

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 25 : Number Three : Fall 2004

25th Anniversary

Getting to Forgiveness

How Far Should Enhancement Go?

Angry People Acting Passive Aggressively

The Holy Fallacy?

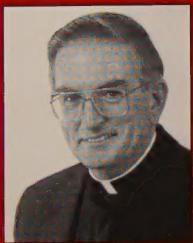
Reconciliation

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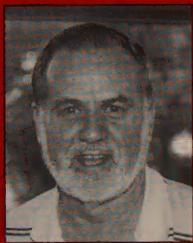
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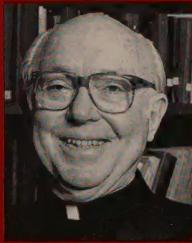
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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

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Editor's Page

CREATING ANOTHER DEFAULT IMAGE OF GOD

The words “God loves us” roll rather easily off the tongue. I wonder how many of us have an image of what God’s love for us means. Before you read any further, ask yourself what image the words evoke in you. Take some time. Give your imagination free rein. If we were together in a room, I would now ask all of us to share the images that came up. Because that is impossible here, let me tell you about my own images and about those of many people to whom I have spoken.

I find that in my unguarded moments I have a default image of God. Almost without thinking I tend to beg for forgiveness for my past sins, or I beg for favors. I cringe interiorly when I image God knowing everything about me. So my spontaneous image of God as loving me does not feature something I have often seen in loving parents, namely sheer delight in their children, enjoyment of their company; they like them. But I don’t transfer that image to God, at least as a default position. I have noticed that many people have similar default image of God.

Does God like me? My default image seems to answer: God wants the best for me, indeed, wants me to be better than I am, but doesn’t particularly like me as I am. These thoughts came to me because of some recent reading in the work of a remarkable young British theologian, James Alison, especially his latest book entitled, *On Being Liked* (Crossroad, 2003). He notes that the word “love” can cover a number of situations that do not look like love at all, e.g., “I love you, but I don’t like your company.” His contention is that God likes us, enjoys us and wants us to flourish. Let’s ponder this image a bit and see where it leads.

In the Book of Wisdom we read the following remarkable prayer:

“For you love all things that exist,
and detest none of the things
that you have made,

*for you would not have made
anything if you had hated it*” (Wisdom 11: 24).

Try to imagine yourself saying it to God, but substituting the word “like” for love. That seems to me to be the more profound meaning of the prayer. As Sebastian Moore years ago reminded us in *Let This Mind Be in You*, unlike our desire, which is triggered by an existing good, God’s desire creates what God wants. It brings everything into existence and makes it all desirable — *to God*. God wants us, hence we are. We need to play with this image over and over again because the default image of God as a Father wagging his finger in admonition at us all the time has sunk deep and early roots in us and will not easily be supplanted. This default image has, in many, if not most of us, overwhelmed the original image that corresponds much more closely to the reality of creation, of God desiring us into existence and delighting in us, enjoying us, liking us.

In Handel’s *Creation Oratorio* God thunders forth to all created beings, including humans, “*Mehret euch!*” Hearing the familiar “Increase and multiply” in German can startle and bring home the multiple dimensions of this divine command and make one wonder about the tone of voice of the command. German can make adjectives and nouns into verbs. “*Mehret*” comes from the adjective “*mehr*,” which means “more.” God is telling creatures, including us, “Make yourselves more; more yourselves.” Of course, reproduction is meant, and probably primarily meant. But I also hear God telling us to expand our gifts, to make more of ourselves, to be creative as God is creative. And I can’t help but imagine the words said in wonder and in joy. God wants all creatures to flourish; God takes delight in that flourishing and in the exuberant creativity that this flourishing entails.

In the second and third chapters of the Book of Genesis we read that God creates this world as a garden in which God and human beings work together.

God invites us, who are created in God's image, to be co-creators, co-workers with God in this joyous work of flourishing, of developing the garden and ourselves to the full. "More yourselves and help all creatures to more themselves." The first humans are naked and unashamed, an image of freedom from fear and of complete transparency. We only see a further development of this image after the first human beings have eaten of the tree and become fearful and ashamed. Then we read: "They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze..." (Gen 3:8). We can imagine this as a daily ritual, God dropping in at the end of the day for a chance to catch up on what has happened during the day. If you play with this image, you get the feeling that God enjoys being with human beings, wants to "chew the fat," as it were. The image is of friendship and enjoyment. What a different image of God this presents from my default image! God likes us and wants to spend time with us.

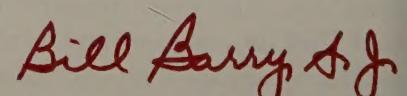
One can read the first twenty or so chapters of Genesis as the story of how God continues to pursue friendship with us in spite of our sins and fears. The first two chapters speak of the original idyll, the way God wants life to be on this planet. Chapters three through eleven depict the effects of the human folly of trying to gain control of a destiny that is freely given by God. They become alienated from God and from one another, leading to the tower of Babel image in chapter eleven where they find themselves unable to communicate with one another. Chapter twelve begins the story of God's effort to change this course of alienation by calling Abram and Sarai to leave their homeland in faith and trust.

Their story can be read as one of growing trust and mutuality. The change to friendship is indicated when God gives them the new names (nicknames?) Abraham and Sarah. But it shows itself also in the humor that develops between God and them. God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great multitude, but Sarah was barren. As both of them grew older, Sarah gave Abraham her maid Hagar, who bore a son Ishmael. But in chapter seventeen God promises that Sarah, who is now eighty-nine, will bear the son from whom the multitude will spring. Abraham falls down laughing at this absurdity and, in effect, tells God

to get serious and bless Ishmael. God seems to get in the spirit of the repartee, telling him that Sarah will indeed have a son with whom the covenant will be made. "As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful....But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year" (Gen 17:17-18). One can sense a smile in these words. In the next chapter God repeats the promise, and Sarah laughs. God asks, "Why did Sarah laugh...?" to which Sarah says, "I did not laugh." God replies, "Oh yes, you did laugh." Again it sounds as though God is enjoying the repartee.

This scene is followed immediately by the remarkable story of how God decides not to hide from Abraham the decision to go to Sodom and Gomorrah to destroy them if things are as bad as reported. God's transparency allows Abraham to intervene to remonstrate with God about this decision. "Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (18:25). In effect, Abraham tells God how to be God. What daring! And what intimacy! Moreover, God agrees to spare the cities if fifty righteous are found, a concession that leads Abraham to haggle with God until the number is reduced to ten. God changes his mind because of Abraham's intervention. This is a story of a developing friendship that God intends as the antidote to human alienation. And the only motive one can ascribe to God for doing this is that God really likes us and wants our friendship.

The choice of Abraham and Sarah begins the turbulent history of the chosen people, chosen not just for their own sakes, but for the sake of the world. This history leads to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, one of Abraham's descendants, in whom God's design is fully revealed. God likes us so much that he pitches his tent among us, becomes one of us. Let's ask God's help to make this our default image, the one that takes over even in our unguarded moments.



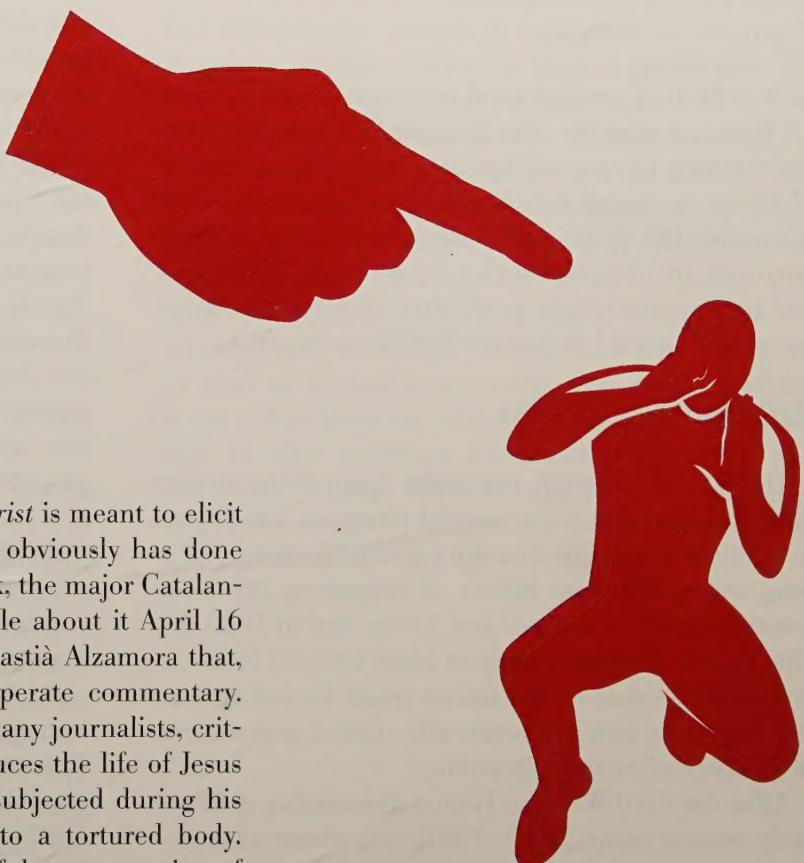
William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief

The Holy Fallacy?

Susan M. DiGiacomo, Ph.D.

Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* is meant to elicit a powerfully visceral response, and it obviously has done so. In Barcelona, where I live and work, the major Catalan-language newspaper, *AVUI*, published an article about it April 16 entitled, "The Holy Fallacy," by the writer Sebastià Alzamora that, two weeks later, continues to generate intemperate commentary. Alzamora condemns the film not because, as many journalists, critics and scholars of religion have argued, it reduces the life of Jesus to the physical degradation to which he was subjected during his final twelve hours, and the person of Jesus to a tortured body. Alzamora rejects it because he sees in it a faithful representation of what he believes to be the "true message" of Christianity: a body of doctrine that exalts pain and suffering, assaults human dignity, institutes the cult of martyrdom" and "sanctifies abjection."

Without denying Alzamora his right to express his opinion, I believe that his argument is tendentious and as burdened by the prejudices of a particular historical moment as, it seems, is the film he condemns. Critics have pointed out the film's literal-mindedness, a trap into which Alzamora also seems to have fallen. Both he and Gibson have situated themselves within a pre-Vatican II Catholic discourse I remember well because it was imposed on me at a young age. It is a discourse that made deliberate use of images of suffering in order to induce, particularly in small children, feelings of fear and



Who among us has not found himself or herself confronting fear and pain alone, begging God for deliverance or grace, whichever comes first?

guilt: a form of psychological terrorism.

I have not seen the film because I have no stomach for watching torture and because the willing spectator of torture is complicit in it. I believe Gibson intended to position the viewer in this way and that the resulting emotions are of a piece with what we were expected to feel half a century ago, as children undergoing indoctrination (a word I do not use lightly) in the faith.

SUFFERING IN THE FRANCO ERA

That was bad enough, but in the Spain of the 1940s, '50s and '60s, this psychological terrorism was joined to political terror. The Spanish Church hierarchy has a long and unfortunate history of supporting the most reactionary social and political forces, and in 1936 the church was only too happy to bless General Franco's "crusade" — that is, the fascist revolt he led against the legitimate and democratically elected government of the Second Spanish Republic.

After the Civil War, the Franco dictatorship deliberately created many forms of suffering whose administration was partially or entirely entrusted to religious orders transformed into agents of state repression: orphanages whose inmates were children forcibly separated from their republican parents; jails filled to bursting with political prisoners, thousands of whom died in front of firing squads, their bodies thrown into mass graves; schools where the obligatory "national-Catholic" curriculum, heavily reliant on images of conquest and martyrdom, was inculcated through humiliation as pedagogical technique. And this is not a complete list. I suspect that Alzamora's rejection of Gibson's film as "stupid, obscene and unnatural" stems from that history, still within living memory, and to the

extent that it does, I understand and sympathize with his rage.

But one thing is an institutional church corrupted by power, and another thing is Scripture, which is rich in possible interpretations. If Jesus was born to die on the cross, we should not lose sight of the Jesus who lived: the Jesus who sat down to eat with those held in contempt by the well-off and the well-connected of his social world (Luke 15:1-2); the Jesus who befriended vulnerable women in a sexist society (Luke 7:37-50; John 8:7-11); the Jesus who exemplified humility, service and care for others (John 13:4-5); the Jesus who was sharply critical of the ostentatious generosity of the parasitic rich and honored the humble generosity of the poor (Mark 13:38-44).

This is the Jesus whose life inspired the worker priests of France and other European countries (including Spain, where important sectors of the Catalan and Basque churches actively supported both cultural and class-based resistance to the Franco regime) after World War II, and those who risk their lives daily to make liberation theology a real force in the world. And, finally, the Jesus of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-44). Who among us has not found himself or herself confronting fear and pain alone, begging God for deliverance or grace, whichever comes first?

CHRISTIANITY'S "TRUE MESSAGE"

What, then, is the "true message" of Christianity? How should we understand the meaning of "original sin"? Why should we take as example and model a man "savagely tortured" to death? In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul preaches "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1:23). "Christ did not send me," he says, "to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power" (1:17). When Paul arrives to establish a Christian community among the Corinthians, he writes, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (2:2). At first glance, perhaps Mel Gibson and Alzamora are right.

But let us not stop here. If we read the entire epistle, the meaning of the cross begins to unfold differently: as the essential equality of the men and the women who formed the community of believers. As charity — love — the most necessary of all graces, the one on which the "upbuilding and encouragement and conso-

tion" (14:3) of others rests. When he writes, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (15:19), Paul is not urging us to "persevere in suffering in order to achieve a phantasmagorical salvation in a world that just so happens to be not our own," as Alzamora believes. The "original sin" against which he inveighs does not make us guilty by virtue of simply having been born"; it is a reminder of the limitations of our human nature: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly" (13:12); "now I know only in part."

The meaning of the cross is that through Jesus' death and resurrection we are given a dual nature: "The first man, Adam, became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.... Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven" (15:45, 49). In his letter to the Romans (8:11), Paul speaks of this as something we should expect in this life: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you."

ETERNITY A DIMENSION OF OUR HUMANITY

In a moment of prophetic insight, Paul says, "Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51). The mystery is, I think, that the transformation of which he speaks is not limited to the Last Judgment, when "the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable" (15:52) in "a world that is not our own," as Alzamora says. That "this mortal body must put on immortality" (15:53) is a possibility available to us in this life, and eternity is not a future time, or an unimaginably long time, but a dimension of our humanity through "the last Adam." In Romans 12:2, Paul urges us, "Do not be conformed to this world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your minds*, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect" (italics mine). And he follows this with a series of recommendations for making God's will for us manifest in our daily lives: through humility, simplicity and compassion, through genuine love (Romans 12:9), through

Salvation, then, is always here and now, and we accept or reject it every day.

honesty and generosity not only in dealings with friends but with enemies as well, in recognition of the fragile humanity we share. Salvation, then, is always here and now, and we accept or reject it every day.

This is what I understand to be the "true message" of Christianity. In the world such as it is, a world that teaches us to be solitary winners and refuses to accept the possibility of a gift not poisoned by obligation, this is a message all too easily lost to view. Gibson's film erases it altogether, according to the reviews and the articles I have read in the Catalan and American press, in favor of torture as spectacle. The meaning of the cross, and of Jesus' life, is the free gift. Insofar as we are able to offer ourselves unreservedly to others, and (what is often more difficult) to receive what is offered to us with an open heart, we are transformed, and we save ourselves and each other every day.



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A Threat to Christian Communities: **ANGRY PEOPLE ACTING PASSIVE AGGRESSIVELY**

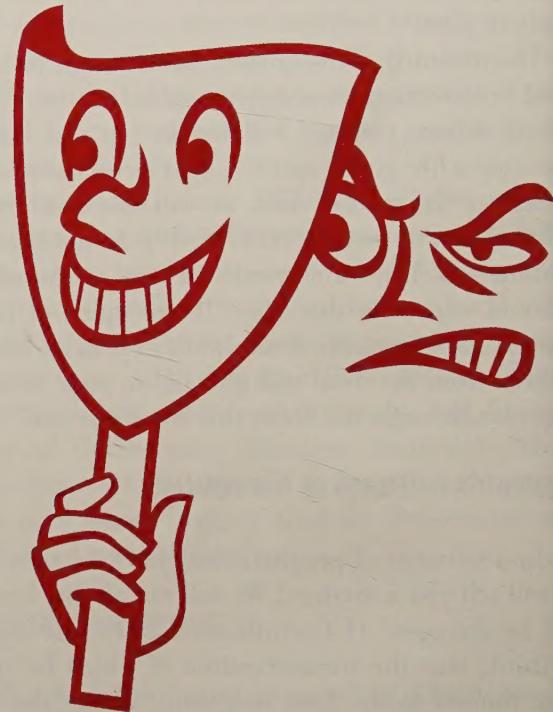
Robert J. Wicks, Psy.D.

Editor's note: This article, frequently requested by readers, is reprinted from Volume 5, Number 4, the Winter 1984 edition of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, as a continuation of the celebration of our 25th anniversary.

Passive aggressiveness is a psychological cancer capable of slowly destroying from within a group with the potential for growth. Unfortunately, Christian communities, instead of being immune to this problem, are often ideal environments for the development and nurturance of passive aggressiveness.

Worshipers and people in ministry, and the social unit within which they operate (i.e., church, religious community, Christian school), often consciously support a style of behavior emphasizing control, suppression, repression, denial of anger and avoidance of conflict. As one might expect, such a psychological philosophy of living can easily lead to personal devastation, an apathetic community or supposedly religious causes that are based on legalism or extremism and unconsciously deliver hostility instead of the Good News of the Gospel.

When anger is not recognized and channeled constructively, in a religious person or a community, a lack of growth and/or increase in personal and communal psychopathology is the expected outcome. Illustrations of this, unfortunately, are easy to uncover. The following are four obvious ones:



- The accommodating priest who gets along with everyone in the parish but develops an ulcer, hypertension, and/or problems with alcoholism or obesity in the process.
- The “nice” — but insular and stagnant — Christian church or school that is so fearful of anger being experienced in its midst that it discourages and denies conflict in any form.
- The Catholic religious who does everything by the letter of the law and devotes much energy to keeping myself or herself from breaking it and to ensuring that others don’t venture out of its bounds as well.
- The Christian activists (e.g., for peace, against abortion) who act with such a vengeance that their message defeats the purported Christian one they aim to be delivering to others by witnessing the truth. That such examples of Christians who are not in touch with their anger, much less aware of their ability and need to use it constructively, are abundant can be traced to the traditional misunderstandings that Christians have had with regard to anger.

CONFUSION ABOUT ANGER

Perfection as a goal can be inspirational. Yet, when it is as one of its tenets the elimination of anger as an emotion, it is a threatening, misguided norm for Christians to follow. Taking New Testament injunctions out of context is one of the key determinants of the confusion and the distortion that lead Christians to want to avoid anger at all costs.

Jesus’ admonition to “turn the other cheek” and the apostle Paul’s encouragement to “put off the old nature” have long been consciously and indirectly employed as supports for the need to subdue one’s anger. To interpret Christ and Paul in this way, however, is to assume that loving one’s neighbor and viewing/renewing one’s life in Christ are tantamount to denying one’s own God-given human nature — which includes emotions such as anger. Christians seeking such perfection may also make light of, or deny, Christ’s own displays of anger at the injustices he saw. As Matthew Fox points out in his popular book on American spirituality, *On Becoming a Musical Mystical Year*, such an outlook can lead to the removal of justified anger from the center of the Christian’s prayer life, which in turn can make life in faith a compartmentalized, artificial one. Fox observes:

Perfection as a goal can be inspirational. Yet, when it has as one of its tenets the elimination of anger as an emotion, it is a threatening, misguided norm for Christians to follow.

Piety and social intransigence go to church regularly hand in hand. In this way, love of neighbor is confused with “being nice” (anger, one’s very capacity for moral outrage, is a sin) and questions of justice are conveniently considered outside the realm of one’s prayer life. In contrast, we have seen that the only real “answer” to prayer is a changed person on the one hand, and a changed people, that is, a changed world or culture, on the other.

David Augsburger, in *Anger and Assertiveness in Pastoral Care*, also points to the confusion Christian leaders in particular may reveal when distinguishing between inappropriate “niceness,” on the one hand, and being a good pastor to those whom they are trying to serve, on the other. The results of such “niceness” can be quite negative. Augsburger explains:

Chronic niceness in a pastor tends to elicit comparable niceness in others, with the result that the negative feelings are not readily shared and resentments accumulate....

Habitual niceness inhibits the free expression of natural responses. It prohibits easy discussion of differences, making it hard to initiate frank interchange. Participants are kept on guard by the fear that their relationship could not survive a spontaneous hassle if one should erupt.

Professional niceness maintains distance between persons.... Irritations are handled with a “soft touch” and the more intimate levels of trust and risk go unexplored....

Perpetual niceness creates patterns of denial in relationships, and the pastor’s denying style can help set the tone for a whole community’s “united front” method of suppressing conflict....

SOURCE OF PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Frustration
of Needs
or Desires



ANGER & BELIEF

(If I show anger
I'll be rejected)

Indirect
Expression
of Anger
(Unconsciously
Motivated)



e.g., (in childhood) bedwetting; stuttering
e.g., (in adulthood) slowness; occupational ineffectiveness

proper, nonviolent human beings. But they are not the peaceful or loving personalities they pretend to be. When they are confronted with the disruptive nature of their style, they do not easily give it up. Often they remain remote and inaccessible to healthy relationships. If any relationship begins to build, the passive-aggressive person quietly withdraws, leaving hurt behind. Unfortunately, this personality is common in religious communities.

Consequently, no longer is the bittersweet veneer of passive aggressiveness seen as the religious ideal to be followed and modeled. Christian writers and lecturers are now openly condemning such pseudo-love of neighbor.

PASSIVE AGGRESSIVENESS DEFINED

Although the term *passive aggressive* is used quite commonly today, many of us still are not quite clear as to what it actually signifies. The American Psychiatric Association does give us some information on it in its portrayal of persons who use indirect anger as a primary defensive style. In *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III*, a passive-aggressive personality disorder is described as that in which there is

resistance to demands for adequate performance in both occupational and social functioning; the resistance is expressed indirectly rather than directly. The consequence is pervasive and persistent social or occupational ineffectiveness, even when more self-assertive and effective behavior is possible. The name of the disorder is based on the assumption that such individuals are passively expressing covert aggression.

George Stricker, in *Passive Aggressiveness: Theory and Practice*, helps us understand the passive-aggressive personality further by theorizing as to its possible origin. He writes:

In a passive-aggressive personality, the frustration of dependency is accompanied by parenting which is threatening that the child does not dare to express feelings directly. The threat may be due to harsh, demanding parental attitudes or it may be due to tenuous parenting, so that the child does not dare risk losing whatever little support he or she has been able to gather. In either case, the direct expression of the anger would lead to consequences so noxious that the expression

Judging from the above comments by both a Catholic and a Protestant theologian, the problems with avoiding or hiding anger among committed religious individuals are obviously coming to light and being discussed at last. Moreover, such recognition that anger is a part of full religious living, as well as something that is part of the natural order, means that it can't be as easily dismissed as something inherently "secular" or irrelevant for the believing Christian, as it was in the past.

Even in the case of passive aggressiveness, where anger is carefully disguised, the issue of misplaced and poorly dealt with anger in religious groups is coming to light, as can be seen in the following quote from Rosine Hammatt and Loughlan Sofield's book *Inside Christian Community*:

Passive-aggressive persons are extremely difficult to deal with because conflict never surfaces and they are unwilling to cooperate. They manage to maintain a rather serene picture of themselves as well-controlled,

hibited, but the feeling remains sufficiently compelling at its expression is sought through alternate channels. The child is unlikely to be able to tell a parent to stop being overly restrictive and demanding, but he or she may be able to wet the bed or stutter or eat poorly without drawing an excessively punitive response. The child is thus likely to get a good deal more attention, negative though it may be, and will also cause the parents to suffer without having to take individual responsibility for doing so. Unfortunately, the choice of such an approach is likely to provide the child with a history of failure experiences and serve to exaggerate the deficit in self-esteem which has already been initiated by the early failures to have its needs met....

In the adult, we can expect to see a relatively agreeable facade, for the person has learned long ago not to express anger directly. Any demand placed on the person, however, is likely to recall earlier demands and lead to similar responses, namely, oppositional and negativistic resistance while maintaining an aura of compliance. The nearer the demands or the more frustrated the dependency needs, the more we can expect to see the person becoming angry, inhibiting anger, becoming resistant, and feeling anxious lest the anger be discovered.

Although most Christians are not suffering from passive-aggressive personality disorder, many occasionally use a passive-aggressive style of dealing with others, especially when they view church leaders as authoritarian, or when, as sincere Christians, they feel they have no right to experience and express anger. A sad reality is that illustrations of this abound in many Catholic diocesan offices, agencies and other settings where the person in charge is a priest and the assistant is a religious sister. In such cases, the sister may be fearful of expressing disagreement or confronting the sexism she perceives. To do so would be to threaten a man with possibly limited understanding of women, which could result in her being fired. Consequently, she either swallows the anger until it builds up to the point of an outburst, or she directs it into passive-aggressive behavior that is unconsciously aimed at hurting the priest and making the work atmosphere tense and the office unproductive. If this problem were discussed in an open way, it might lead to opportunities for growth for both parties involved and ultimately contribute to a more vital church. Instead, it often goes unaddressed or builds up to a very explosive situation where neither

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charity nor justice is served well. So there is much value for both clergy and religious to be able to uncover and deal with behavior that induces passive-aggressiveness; this would reduce sexism and improve male-female relations in the church and among Christians who constitute the vital community we call "the people of God."

The key element to recognize in this form of interpersonal behavior is that overt passive aggressiveness, which takes the form of passivity, is used to express feelings of aggression without the person being aware of it. Thus, recognition of this style of behavior is important not because anger is good but because indirect, unconscious expression of it by us and others is destructive.

UNCOVERING PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Appreciating when and how passive aggressiveness is present is the logical place to start in presenting an overview of this style of indirectly dealing with anger. In the Christian setting — though naturally by no means restricted to it — there are a number of classic ways in which persons demonstrate passive aggressiveness. During personal reflection as well as during work with Christian persons or groups, noting the ways anger seeps out can be helpful. Typically, passive aggressiveness is demonstrated by behavior such as obstructionism, procrastination, forgetfulness, stubbornness or intentional inefficiency.

A general but often accurate and useful way of uncovering passive-aggressive behavior is to look for unexpected angry reactions in ourselves and others. When we or others are passive aggressive, the aggression is covert and therefore beyond the immediate awareness of the person behaving this way. Thus, uncovering passive-aggressive behavior, particularly in ourselves, is usually difficult.

By definition, when we act in this way we are psycho-

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logically trying to avoid being seen as aggressive, though the underlying feeling is negative. Though we may be feeling hostile, we overtly appear passive and pseudo-compliant. We believe we are trying to do the right thing; so even though we may not be as prompt, for instance, as the other person would like, we feel we are doing our best and are upset if we are accused of dragging our feet. Consequently, time needs to be taken for self-examination to uncover our motivations for acting the way we are. In doing this we must try to recognize our anger and unmask our passive aggressiveness.

Whether in prayer, moments of meditation and contemplation or periods of introspection, Christians have long been expected and disciplined to take stock of their lives on a daily basis. In Roman Catholic circles, those in ministry have usually been educated to make a daily consciousness examen. This practice has been somewhat on the wane, but with the encouragement provided by the writings of George Aschenbrenner, interest in continuing the practice in a holistic fashion has revived over the past decade.

More recently, a number of books have been published on self-examination and personal awareness for Christians. In *Christian Introspection: Self-Ministry through Self-Understanding*, I suggested that persons take the time to view their personalities introspectively with an eye to how God might be influencing their lives. The goal is to help people see how their personality facilitates their ministry and to help them be aware of when they trip over it (i.e., become overly defensive) in their effort to reach out to others. Included in that book is a brief section on anger. With respect to passive aggressiveness, the use of the process the book describes (Christian introspection), or that of consciousness examen, provides an opportunity for us to see the vitality of anger and the destructiveness that

comes with trying to deny anger "for the greater glory of God."

Any self-examination process gives one a chance to review motivations for behavior and how and why certain emotions and thoughts arise. If this part of the process is taken seriously, then passive aggressiveness and self-righteousness, which are destructive to the whole community, can be curbed.

To help achieve a better recognition of anger, its indirect expressions (including passive aggressiveness) and the motivations we as Christians have with respect to uncovering and dealing with it, some basic questions such as the following might be included in the daily examen or introspective process:

What did I get angry at today? (not, What made me angry?)

With whom did I get angry today? (not, Who made me angry?)

In addition to the apparent reason for my being angry or annoyed, what might be other reasons in me that would be responsible for the anger being so great?

How did I deal with my anger or annoyance? Did I try to conceal it? Did I deny it or play it down? Did I wrap it in a pseudo-Christian cover? ("Don't get me wrong, I don't dislike him, just what he is doing to the institution and himself." "I really feel he is misguided he's really not a bad person.")

How did I spontaneously allow my anger to rise in my mind so I could examine it?

Was I able to review my anger and try to deal constructively with disagreements, with the understanding that communication won't solve everything, but that opening up a discussion about our differences is certainly a start? Or did I just try to scare people with my anger or win them over by giving in and being passive?

Did I present my anger to the source of it, or did I put the anger on someone else or make believe I wasn't angry?

With specific reference to my own possible passive aggressive tendencies: "Did I act in a way that was obstructionistic?" "Did I dawdle or procrastinate? Was I stubborn or forgetful?" "Was I surprised by someone else's anger to something I did or said?" (This last question is a great one to pose as a way of uncovering how we may have covertly expressed aggression without our being aware of it at the time.)

These questions are but samples of the types we can use in an effort to uncover, own, appreciate and deal

with anger that comes up as a part of life. The times for examination of self are periods that provide a natural opportunity to become more sensitive to both the love and the anger in ourselves, so that we do not develop into packaged Christians who deny real spontaneity of emotions. Questioning ourselves in this way is a part of respecting life both in ourselves and in others.

CAUSES OF PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

The etiology of a passive-aggressive *personality* and the causes of passive-aggressive *behavior* in fairly healthy Christians are different. The person suffering from a passive-aggressive personality disorder is experiencing a longstanding difficulty. As we noted earlier in Tricker's comments, it is attributed to early problems with dependency. Essentially, this type of person has failed to have certain needs gratified as a child. Consequently, the child is both frustrated and angry but unsure of what strategy to use to get his or her needs met. There is a fear that "if I am direct, I will be rejected and lose all chance of having my needs met." On the other hand, because of the frustration, the anger must come out in some way, and this is achieved indirectly. Treatment of this type of individual is difficult and involved and not within the purview of this article. Such individuals, when noticed in community living, may need to be referred for psychological treatment.

On the other hand, passive-aggressive behavior in Christians is something we can and should address. Rather than such behavior being tied to a serious personality deficit, it is symptomatic of a problem in the environment. Unfortunately, in many cases Christians train Christians to avoid anger or to be indirect in the way they express it. Meetings, for example, are an ideal place for this to occur. If the dynamics are not understood, then healthy persons who are trying to be aware of and constructively deal with anger can be made to believe that their own process, rather than a distorted religious one, is inappropriate. The following is a simple illustration:

Father Smith: Jim, you really seemed to be upset at our parish council meeting.

Jim: Yes. The way Bill and Mary were trying to close out options other than their own in dealing with the youth group infuriated me. I wanted to let them know, we could openly deal with it.

Father Smith: This is a Christian group, Jim. We all

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have differences, but anger isn't going to help; you ought to think about controlling it a bit better. We can always drop hints to them when we see them alone.

Instead of encouraging Jim to learn how to channel his anger openly in a way that would not be destructive to others, the priest is exhorting him to suppress it. If Jim does so, only resentment and "hidden agendas" will result. Also, if anger is handled in the way Father Smith suggests, the community members will never deal with their fears of conflict. Thus, they will never achieve the intimacy needed to become a cohesive group or, in religious terms, a "faith community."

Writing memos is another way of showing anger indirectly toward another person; the technique allows us to send the barb from a distance. In a religious community, such written communications are frequently employed to censure someone else safely. One familiar memo technique is to leave a message posted regarding something that has produced anger. The memo usually has three elements: (1) justification of one's own stand (as being correct and "Christian"); (2) reference to the injury being caused by a person vaguely recognizable from the information given; and (3) pseudo-forgiveness of the person who did it (so he or she shouldn't retaliate by being angry). The following is an example of a note that might well be seen on the door of a religious community's refrigerator:

Thursday, February 12th

Signing out the car is something that I feel I have a responsibility to do; consequently, I try to do this well in advance so as not to cause anyone any inconvenience. Yesterday, I wanted to borrow the car for my usual weekly visit to help my parents, but the car was gone. It had been signed out at the last moment to deliver some

The movement away from burying our aggression and allowing it to arise in a disguised fashion involves recognition, self-reeducation and appropriate action.

goods. Though this possibly could have waited, and though I understand that this was a worthwhile trip, and I recognize I must also compromise, I do ask that in the future we try to set up these journeys in advance so we don't cause unnecessary hardship to each other.

Thank you.

With respect specifically to the indirect form of expressing anger we call passive aggressiveness (i.e., obstructionism, procrastination, forgetfulness, stubbornness and intentional inefficiency), there are four common causes for it that we frequently see in Christian settings:

•*Guilt.* The person's belief is, "It is a sin for me to express my anger or disagreement directly. I have no right to voice views contrary to authority."

•*Anxiety.* In this instance, the thought is, "If I show my displeasure with the church's (pastor's, superior's, etc.) decision or action, I shall be punished."

•*Apathy.* The underlying attitude in this case is, "What's the sense in getting angry, since it won't do any good anyway?"

•*Sacrifice.* This cause is akin to the first one listed, guilt. The thinking here is, "If I am angry I should swallow it and even do harm to myself rather than impose it on someone else."

In all of the above cases, strategies for correcting this thinking can and should be developed. If they are, we can put an end to the belief that when anger is avoided, it disappears. Moreover, we can open new possibilities in creative, vital Christian living.

SOME STRATEGIES SUGGESTED

A final question to be faced is, "How shall we deal with passive-aggressive behavior in ourselves and oth-

ers?" The movement away from burying our aggression and allowing it to arise in a disguised fashion involves recognition, self-reeducation and appropriate action.

As noted already, recognition of passive aggressiveness becomes possible when we are disciplined in our examen and strive to see when we or others are behaving in ways that block effectiveness. Being alert to situations when others' seemingly appropriate actions result in an angry reaction on our part, and to the times when others seem annoyed about the manner in which we are behaving, can open the door to seeing apparently compliant (but actually obstructionistic) behavior in ourselves and others for what it really is — a manifestation of covert aggression.

Accomplishing this is never easy. Obstructionism, procrastination, forgetfulness, stubbornness and inefficiency often parade themselves as something else. When people deal with us in passive-aggressive fashion we may not recognize their aggression and so feel guilty when we get angry at these persons who are "doing the best they can" but who seem to hinder our progress.

Illustrations of this type of reaction are easy to find. Take a Catholic high school setting, for example. Suppose the principal is a very bright, energetic, but fairly self-sufficient administrator, and she has a fairly strong-willed assistant principal who feels left out of the decision-making process. In such a case, the frustrated assistant principal may unconsciously employ a passive-aggressive style and (1) constantly question the decisions of the principal; (2) forget to implement some of the directives; (3) stubbornly disagree even after a decision is made; (4) take longer than necessary to contact people; or (5) do more research than necessary as part of the planning for assigned projects.

The principal may be angry about her assistant's inefficiency but may only regard the person as inept or overly methodical. She may also feel guilty about getting angry, thinking, "I expect too much of everyone." The problem may then be compounded when she discusses the inefficiency with her assistant, who responds by saying such things as, "Well, what should I do?" This results in more work for the principal, since she has to give detailed directives repeatedly; in effect, she now has two jobs to do. The assistant might say, "Look how hard I am trying" (attempting to induce further guilt) or might offer an unending list of excuses (the "yes, but" syndrome). However, if the principal in this case has recognized what is actually taking place (i.e., for some reason her assistant feels angry but is not able

deal with it directly) she has actually taken the first step toward solving the problem.

Once passive aggressiveness is recognized, and before any action is taken, the second step entails self-education. This process is necessitated by the four already-mentioned environmental causes of passive-aggressive behavior in the Christian setting. The self-education is as follows:

Old thought (guilt): *It is a sin for me to express my anger or disappointment directly; I have no right to voice views contrary to authority.*

New thought: *If I am angry or disagree, I should try to find out why through self-examination. Then once I own my anger, I should present it in a constructive fashion (i.e., in a neutral, specific way with the goal of trying to find a solution).*

Old thought (anxiety): *If I show I am angry or disagree with him/her, he/she will retaliate.*

New thought: *The worst thing that can happen is that he/she will be angry and not understand. However, I have a right to express my anger and a duty to do it in a constructive fashion — not through an outburst and not indirectly.*

Old thought (apathy): *What's the sense in getting angry, since it won't do any good.*

New thought: *I should not make generalizations and give up but should try to present disagreements that are genuine, with the hope that the other people can appreciate my position and help me appreciate theirs.*

Old thought (sacrifice): *If I am angry I should swallow it and even harm myself rather than impose it on someone else.*

New thought: *Trying to understand my anger and discuss it with someone else in a way that is respectful in itself a sacrifice because it takes some effort. If I try to hide it, I will not be treating myself respectfully or the other person honestly.*

Such self-reeducation will allow us, and the principal in the illustration, (1) to help recognize and deal with our anger in a productive fashion and (2) to assist others to move away from a passive-aggressive style.

SOME POSSIBLE ACTIONS

Once passive aggressiveness is recognized and we have reeducated our thinking, action is then possible. This does not mean dumping our aggression on others or encouraging them to give us their anger in a shot-

The ultimate goal when confronting our own passive aggressiveness or that of others is to find out why we or they are angry and why we or they are having problems expressing it directly.

gun fashion. When we see it in ourselves, it means recognizing that we are in fact angry, owning it, trying to understand it and communicating it in a way that leads to a solution. When we see it in others, it means trying to find out why they are angry. In doing so we must expect that they may not be aware of it, may deny it and may try to put the onus back on us. To succeed, we should respond (1) by trying to reward passive-aggressive persons when they are assertive; (2) by helping them face their passivity and not doing the job for them (i.e., by not answering the question "Well, how would you like me to do it?" with a solution of our own, but instead, setting the stage for their self-examination by asking them to find ways they can be more productive); (3) by pointing it out to others when they seem to disagree with the strategy; and (4) by allowing the anger to surface and showing that we are open to discussing it. The ultimate goal when confronting our own passive aggressiveness or that of others is to find out why we or they are angry and why we or they are having problems expressing it directly. All strategies for dealing with passive-aggressive behavior in ourselves and others must deal with these two basic questions.

Once we Christians, and the religious community in general, stop seeing the emotion of anger as being either good or bad and recognize it as a sign of personal vitality, we will be able to distinguish between *experiencing* the emotion of anger, on the one hand, and *expressing* or dealing with anger, on the other. With such an awareness we can begin to work on using our anger constructively, instead of trying to eliminate it through suppression, denial, avoidance or passivity. In addition, we can avoid the opposite extreme of confusing assertiveness with aggression and believing that we should fight back

by stamping on others first or in return.

Ministerial assertiveness is grounded in a belief that we, as effective Christians, can and should understand what makes us angry; be able to relate the feelings of anger to a specific issue; find the courage to recognize and remove unfinished business in our personality so the conflict area can be put into realistic perspective; and be able to communicate our concerns to others in a manner that does not unduly raise defensiveness. It is also based on an appreciation of the fact that sometimes we are angry with others because our needs or expectations are unrealistic. When they are realistic, ministerial assertiveness calls for an openness that does not justify being aggressive and driving others away, that does not glorify passivity and prevent a free, real interchange, but allows angers to be dealt with as they arise rather than when they blow up after a long period of being buried in a sea of "niceness."

ANGER A SIGN OF CONCERN

The owning of anger is essential not only to promote honest interpersonal relations among us as Christians but also to help us focus clearly on the validity of being angry at injustices and disgusted with what is wrong with society today. Anger is not only a personal human emotion but also, at times a sign of our intense concern for others. It alerts us to the frustration of our realistic and unrealistic needs, and it points out when others are touching sensitive areas in our psychological makeup or are committing community injustices that are personally unacceptable.

Anger, then, can be a diagnostic tool to help us learn about ourselves, our defenses, our limits and our beliefs, but such diagnosis cannot take place if anger is seen as forbidden and is buried before it can be viewed and analyzed for what it is. Thus, passive aggressiveness, which is built on the denial of anger and kept hidden under a seemingly loving veneer, needs to be uncovered and dealt with as part of our movement toward living creative Christian community. Church

leaders who still view anger as a threat that must be punished and not as an indication of possible real injustices that should be addressed must be reeducated to be more open and less fearful. To do less is to deny freedom and growth in the church at a time when it is sorely needed.

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Seven or Seventy-Seven: What is Forgiveness, and How Do We Get There?

Kelly M. McConnell

Editor's note: This article was solicited as an additional resource for helping survivors of sexual abuse. The author works closely with Kenneth I. Pargament, Ph.D., a leading expert on forgiveness.

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

— Mt 18:21-22

Forgiveness is a defining construct of Christian belief, standing at the religious, theological and ethical core of the Christian tradition. Forgiveness represents the possibility of change in individuals and relationships that have been damaged by offenses. Jesus commands his followers to go beyond human conceptions of fairness and justice to forgive as God forgives. Peter's question to Jesus suggests that Peter believes forgiving another person seven times is more than adequate. However, Jesus challenges Peter's limited view, instructing him to forgive every offense of his fellow man, even if wronged seventy-seven times.

Jesus' command to forgive is a tall order. Forgiving someone who has hurt you is a difficult task. Forgiveness is even more difficult when the offense shatters the emotions, life and soul of an individual, such as in cases of sexual abuse and violent crimes. The following story, told in Michael Christopher's play, *The Black Angel*, demonstrates how difficult forgiveness can be:

Herman Engel, a World War II German general, was released from prison after a thirty-year sentence for war crimes. He built a cabin in the woods where he and his wife planned to live the remainder of



Survivors of offenses, especially offenses that are particularly traumatizing and devastating, may feel trapped between their religious beliefs and their emotions related to the offense.

their lives unnoticed. However, a French journalist named Morrieaux was waiting for Engel. Engel's army had massacred Morrieaux's family during the war, and Morrieaux had pledged to kill Engel upon Engel's release. Toward this end, Morrieaux organized a band of men from the village, planning to burn Engel's cabin and kill Engel and his wife. However, Morrieaux wanted to ask Engel about the massacre before Engel's death. He went to Engel's cabin and spent the entire day grilling Engel with questions. But, instead of finding the evil monster he had expected, Morrieaux found a tired and feeble old man. Morrieaux was confused by this, and his hate was contaminated with doubt. At the end of the day, Morrieaux told Engel that the villagers were coming that night to kill him and offered to lead Engel out of the woods to safety. Engel replied, "I'll go with you on one condition. That you forgive me." Morrieaux, faced with Engel's humanity, was caught in a conflict between years of hate of his family's murderer and the feebleness of this old man. In the end, he was willing to save Engel's life but he could not forgive. Later that night, the villagers came, shot Engel and his wife and burned down the cabin.

Forgiveness is not easy. At times, forgiveness may seem impossible. Yet, survivors of offenses are often pressured or forced to forgive by those around them. In the Spring 2004 Special Issue of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Towards Healing Our Church* (Vol. 25, No. 1), Slávka Michančová wrote about her experience as a sexual abuse survivor. "Commonly, instead of allowing a victim to deal first with anger, she is told or even pushed to forgive." Victims often feel abused all over again by these demands for forgiveness.

Christians who are survivors of abuse may also feel guilty and afraid as a result of their struggle or inability to forgive. First, they may feel guilty about their inability to follow Jesus' command to forgive. Forgiveness is

a fundamental concept in Christian beliefs. Survivors may view their inability to set aside the desire for retribution and to forgive as a failure to practice their religious beliefs, causing strong feelings of guilt and shame. Second, Jesus' teaching on the consequences of not forgiving others is unambiguous. "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mt 6:14-15). Survivors who feel incapable of forgiving a transgressor may fear the possibility that God is not forgiving their sins.

Survivors of offenses, especially offenses that are particularly traumatizing and devastating, may feel trapped between their religious beliefs and their emotions related to the offense. Recognizing this dilemma, this article will tackle the complex issue of forgiveness. First, I will address the definition of forgiveness in secular and religious contexts in order to clarify the meaning of this complex construct. Second, the secular and the religious effects of forgiveness on the survivor will be explored. Finally, I will discuss how forgiveness occurs and how we can help others achieve forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS DEFINED

The variety of definitions of forgiveness in academic literature reflects the complexity of forgiveness. Despite a recent increase in interest, a single accepted definition of forgiveness does not exist. However, psychologist Robert D. Enright has written extensively on forgiveness and provides a definition that is widely cited and applies to many situations and individuals. Enright's definition of forgiveness contains two components: 1) the "willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, condemnation, and subtle revenge toward an offender who acts unjustly," and 2) the "fostering of the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her." Forgiveness, then, consists of a decrease in negative responses and an increase in positive responses toward a transgressor. These responses do not have to be actions but can be emotional or cognitive in nature. This definition is valuable because it captures the complexity of forgiveness while providing a concrete explanation of the change that occurs when an individual forgives.

Although researchers do not agree on a single definition of forgiveness, they do agree on what forgiveness is *not*. By understanding the concepts that are different from forgiveness, we can distinguish among related

eas and better identify what is expected of an individual who is trying to forgive. First, forgiveness is different from pardoning, a legal term indicating that judicial punishment has been waived. An individual who is serving a legal sentence can be forgiven. Second, forgiveness must be distinguished from condoning, which suggests that the offense was justified and that forgiveness is unnecessary. Similarly, excusing an offense suggests that the transgressor had good reason to commit the wrongdoing, rendering forgiveness inappropriate. Third, forgiving is different from forgetting. In some cases, such as physical or sexual abuse, forgetting may not only be impossible, but also may place the survivor in danger by increasing his or her vulnerability to further abuse. The survivor can forgive while still recognizing and learning from the offense. Fourth, forgiveness must be distinguished from denial that an offense has occurred. Survivors may use denial to protect themselves from the pain of the offense. However, forgiveness cannot truly occur until the survivor recognizes the injury caused by the transgressor. Finally, forgiveness is different from reconciliation or the restoration of the relationship between the survivor and transgressor. While forgiveness may lead to and is a precondition for reconciliation, forgiveness can occur in the absence of reconciliation. In some cases, reconciliation may be impossible or unsafe, such as when the transgressor is unavailable or untrustworthy.

RELIGIOUS MEANING OF FORGIVENESS

Recent interest in forgiveness in secular academic arenas has led to the detachment of forgiveness from its religious foundation. However, forgiveness is an important construct in many world religions. Therefore, true understanding of forgiveness requires examination of its religious meaning. Interpersonal forgiveness is discussed in both the Hebrew and the Christian Bibles. In the Hebrew Bible, the survivor of an offense is required to forgive a truly repentant transgressor. This forgiveness restores the relationship between the transgressor and the survivor and community. Forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible differs from the New Testament definition in which forgiveness is unconditional. According to the New Testament, the survivor of an offense must forgive, regardless of whether the transgressor apologizes for his or her actions. In addition to definitions of forgiveness, the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament provide models of and resources for forgiveness.

Survivors may use denial to protect themselves from the pain of the offense. However, forgiveness cannot truly occur until the survivor recognizes the injury caused by the transgressor.

Religious individuals, such as the patriarch Joseph in the book of Genesis and Jesus, provide examples of forgiveness in the face of personal pain and suffering. In addition, religious resources, such as prayers, rituals and fellow believers, help facilitate forgiveness. In these ways, forgiveness and religion are intimately tied to the degree that, for a religious individual, separating forgiveness from religious beliefs may be impossible.

Our expectations of victims who are trying to forgive are refined by knowledge of the definition of forgiveness and what constructs are different from forgiveness. We cannot expect the survivors of offenses to act as though they were not injured or hurt by the transgressor. To do so would only exacerbate their pain. Lewis B. Smedes, in *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*, writes, "When we forgive evil we do not excuse it, we do not tolerate it, we do not smother it. We look the evil full in the face, call it what it is, let its horror shock and stun and enrage us, and only then do we forgive it." An understanding of the definition of forgiveness ensures that we do not expect more from survivors of offenses than is necessary for forgiveness to occur.

BENEFITS OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiving an individual who has hurt or injured you is difficult. Forgiveness takes time and energy and requires that the victim change his or her perception of and feelings toward the transgressor. Is it worth the effort? Does the survivor come out better on the other side of the forgiveness process? Research suggests that forgiveness benefits the survivor in secular and religious ways. In multiple studies, individuals who reported forgiving others had fewer depressed emotions, greater life satisfaction and less anxiety about dying than individuals who did not forgive others. This research suggests that forgiveness is related to

Blaming others for one's misfortunes has been associated with negative outcomes, including poor emotional well-being and physical health.

positive psychological and health outcomes. In *How Can It Be All Right When Everything Is All Wrong*, Smedes discusses the effects of not forgiving on an individual's well-being:

When you make a hard decision against forgiving, you lock yourself in a strait jacket of your own resentment. You get boxed into a house haunted only with horrid memories. Unrelieved resentment is like a videotape inside your soul, playing its tormenting reruns of the rotten things somebody did to you, playing it over and over, wrenching your soul tighter every time it plays.

Research on factors related to unforgiveness, such as blame, anger, and hostility, also suggests that forgiving others is beneficial. Blaming others for one's misfortunes has been associated with negative outcomes, including poor emotional well-being and physical health. Anger and hostility have been associated with earlier death in several studies, while increasing positive emotional states improves immune system functioning and reduces heart rate and blood pressure. By decreasing blame, anger and hostility, forgiveness may eliminate the negative impact of these emotions and tap into the benefits of positive emotion.

FORGIVENESS HELPS DECREASE VICTIM'S DISTRESS

A survivor's religious well-being may also benefit from forgiving a transgressor. First, Jesus instructs believers to forgive as God forgives. Believers who have not forgiven a transgressor may feel that their actions are conflicting with their religious beliefs. Kenneth I. Pargament, in *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice*, calls this con-

flict fragmentation. Fragmentation between beliefs and actions has been associated with less personal control, lower self-esteem, less trust in others and fewer active coping skills. In addition, resolving fragmentation to produce integration or consistency between religious beliefs and behaviors has been associated with less distress and greater life satisfaction. By forgiving a transgressor, survivors will decrease fragmentation and create consistency between their religious beliefs (Jesus' instruction to forgive) and their behaviors (feeling toward a transgressor). Smedes writes, "When you forgive someone who has hurt you, you are dancing to the rhythm of the divine heartbeat." Through forgiveness, victims incorporate their beliefs into their lives, decreasing the distress that results from religious fragmentation.

Second, forgiveness may impact an individual's religious well-being by deepening his or her relationship with God. John Patton, in a chapter on forgiveness in pastoral counseling, writes that forgiveness characterizes our relationship with God. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we are forgiven for our offenses. Therefore, God is present in any experience of forgiveness, given or received. By practicing forgiveness, survivors of offenses are living in communion with God, deepening and strengthening their relationship with God. In addition, those who forgive bring God into their lives and identities, making God an integral part of their existence. In this way, an individual's religious well-being may benefit from forgiving a transgressor.

HELPING OTHERS FORGIVE

How do we help victims resolve the tension between religious commands to forgive and the pain and resentment caused by transgressors? How do we help individuals who have been hurt by devastating offenses reach forgiveness without exacerbating their pain? First, we need to remember that only the survivor of the offense can choose to forgive. Forgiveness researchers do not agree on a definition of forgiveness. However, they do agree that forgiveness must be the active decision of the victim. Patton writes, "...what we do in responding to those who have been hurt by life and relationships is not to encourage or insist they forgive, but to be with them in the pain of being themselves." Survivors pressured to forgive may engage in what social psychologists Roy F. Baumeister, Julie J. Exline and Kristin L. Sommer call "hollow forgiveness." Hollow forgiveness occurs when the victim expresses forgiveness to the

ansgressor but does not feel the forgiveness in his or her heart. The hurt and resentment caused by the offense still remain. Hollow forgiveness may exacerbate survivors' pain by eliminating their ability to express the negative feelings caused by the offense.

Genuine forgiveness comes from the heart. When we pressure individuals to forgive, we eliminate their choice and may lead them to express a forgiveness they do not feel. In addition, when we eliminate their choice to forgive, we may increase their feelings of guilt regarding the struggle to forgive. As I mentioned earlier, forgiving is difficult. The survivor may perceive his or her inability to forgive as a failure to follow Jesus' command, leading to guilt and fear. Insisting that survivors should forgive may highlight their failure and exacerbate their feelings of guilt and fear. The choice to forgive belongs to the survivors. By making that choice for them, we may eliminate the possibility of genuine forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS TAKES TIME

Second, when helping others toward forgiveness, we must also remember that forgiveness is a process that takes time. Forgiveness, especially for offenses that hurt deeply, may take weeks, months or even years to achieve. For example, as a child, C. S. Lewis was bullied by a teacher who tormented the lives of his students. For years, Lewis was unable to forgive this teacher who had caused him so much pain. Shortly before his death, Lewis wrote the following in a letter to a friend.

*....Do you know, only a few weeks ago I realized suddenly that I had at last forgiven the cruel schoolmaster who so darkened my childhood. I'd been trying to do it for years; and like you, each time I thought I'd done it, I found, after a week or so it all had to be attempted over again. But this time I feel sure it is the real thing... (cited in Smedes' *Forgive and Forget*).*

Lewis struggled his entire life to forgive and finally achieved "the real thing." We cannot expect survivors of offenses to forgive overnight. However, we can support them as they struggle toward forgiveness, assuring them that forgiveness does not come quickly for anyone.

Research on formal forgiveness interventions shows that longer interventions are more effective than short interventions at helping individuals move toward

In addition, when we eliminate their choice to forgive, we may increase their feelings of guilt regarding the struggle to forgive.

forgiveness. In a collaborative research project, counseling psychologist Everett L. Worthington, Jr., compared three forgiveness interventions and found that "anything done to promote forgiveness has little impact unless substantial time is spent at helping participants think through and emotionally experience their forgiveness."

First, forgiveness cannot be rushed; there is no "quick fix." In order for genuine forgiveness to occur, survivors must work through their pain and their emotions. Second, when we help survivors through the process of forgiveness, we must be willing to become involved in their lives, recognizing that they will need significant time and support as they struggle toward forgiveness. Third, we can help survivors resolve the conflict between their religious beliefs and emotions by working with them toward forgiveness using formal forgiveness interventions.

Researchers have created and tested a variety of forgiveness interventions. Many of these interventions target specific populations, e.g., post-abortion men. However, Worthington created a forgiveness intervention that applies to individuals dealing with diverse offenses. The components of this intervention are common across formal forgiveness interventions. The following description of Worthington's intervention is not intended to be a manual from which the intervention can be performed. Instead, this description will highlight those components that are consistent across forgiveness interventions and will provide a model of the forgiveness process.

REACH — AN INTERVENTION PROCESS

Worthington's intervention process contains five steps, represented by the acronym **REACH**.

As helpers, we must be sensitive to such feelings and allow survivors to experience them fully. Survivors must work through their negative feelings, as stated in Step 1, before they can begin to empathize with the transgressor.

Step 1: Recall the Hurt. In this step, we encourage survivors to recall the pain caused by the transgressor. The survivor discusses the hurt caused by the offense without fully experiencing the associated pain in order to eliminate the relationship between the memory of the offense and the pain. By repeatedly recalling the offense in a safe environment, the survivor eventually will be able to think about the offense without feeling the associated pain. Therefore, providing a safe and supportive environment for the survivor and keeping the emotional tone of the discussion low is important. The purpose of Step 1 is to help the survivor change his or her cognitive response to the transgressor. Do not expect the survivor's emotional reaction to the transgressor to change this early in the forgiveness process.

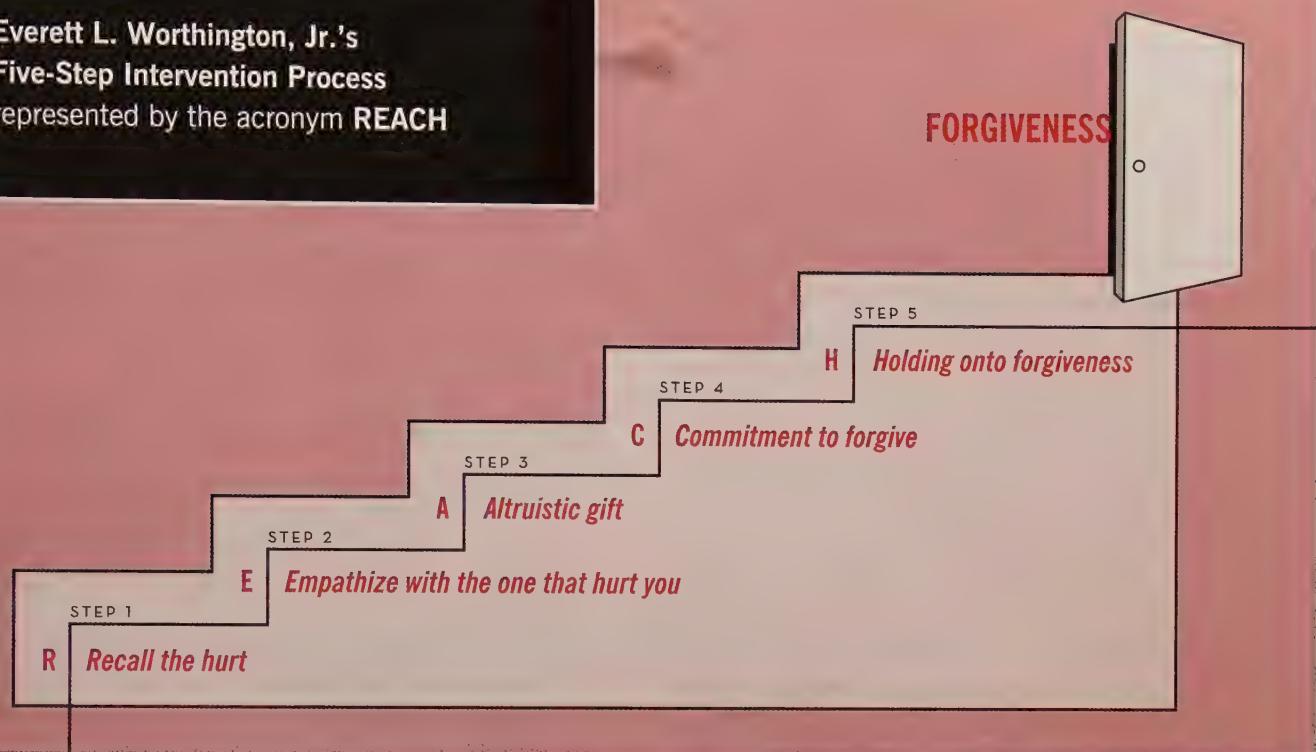
Step 2: Empathize With the One Who Hurt You. The purpose of this step is to create feelings of empathy in the survivor for the transgressor. Empathy is a key component of this intervention because it combats the survivor's negative emotional response toward the transgressor. Worthington provides a variety of methods to initiate feelings of empathy. For example, the victim can speculate about the thoughts or the feelings of the transgressor during the offense, recall positive experiences with the transgressor and imagine interacting with the transgressor during pleasant times. Genuine forgiveness will probably not occur at this step, even if the survivor can empathize with the transgressor. However, incorporating empathy into the survivor's emotional response toward the transgressor is

progress toward forgiveness. This step may be difficult for survivors, especially those who have suffered particularly violent or devastating transgressions. Patton writes about his daughter's reaction to the idea that empathy is necessary for forgiveness. As a rape victim, she was angered by the idea that she must see herself "like" the individual who victimized her in order to forgive. As helpers, we must be sensitive to such feelings and allow survivors to experience them fully. Survivors must work through their negative feelings, as stated in Step 1, before they can begin to empathize with the transgressor.

Step 3: Altruistic Gift. Forgiveness for an offense is a gift that the transgressor does not deserve to receive. Survivors must view their forgiveness as a gift for genuine forgiveness to occur. To help survivors view forgiveness as a gift, we first encourage them to recognize their ability to cause another person pain. For example, the survivor may be asked to think of a person he or she has hurt. By realizing that they, too, have hurt others, survivors enhance their humility and their empathy for the transgressor. We then encourage survivors to recall a time they received forgiveness for an offense, instructing them to focus on the positive feelings associated with receiving forgiveness, such as freedom, release and gratitude. By recognizing their own ability to hurt others and the positive feelings associated with receiving forgiveness, survivors identify with the transgressor and see the transgressor's need for forgiveness. Through this process, the survivor comes to view forgiveness as a gift he or she can give the transgressor.

Step 4: Commitment to Forgive. By this step in the intervention the survivor may have forgiven the transgressor in his or her heart. However, forgiveness that is covert in this way is easy to doubt or deny later. Therefore, the survivor is encouraged to publicly state his or her forgiveness to another individual or to a group. The purpose of this public statement is to make someone besides the survivor aware of the forgiveness, solidifying that forgiveness has occurred. A public statement of forgiveness can be made in a variety of ways. For example, the survivor can talk about his or her experience of forgiveness. In addition, the survivor can write a letter to the transgressor expressing his or her forgiveness and can read this letter to others. The type of public statement is less important than achieving the purpose of the statement, which is to make someone besides the survivor aware of the forgiveness and to confirm that forgiveness has been achieved.

Everett L. Worthington, Jr.'s
Five-Step Intervention Process
represented by the acronym **REACH**



Step 5: Holding Onto Forgiveness. Maintaining forgiveness is difficult. Many survivors will doubt whether they have or should have forgiven the transgressor. We remind survivors that recalling the hurt caused by the transgressor and experiencing the associated feelings of pain, anger and sadness are not the same as unForgiveness. In addition, we can encourage the survivor not to try to deny or suppress his or her negative emotions. Survivors will only increase the strength of their emotions by focusing on them in this way. Instead, survivors should focus on their forgiveness, rereading their letter or thinking about their public statement of forgiveness. Finally, if the survivor is struggling to hold onto his or her forgiveness, encourage him or her to work through the five steps again, especially if new offenses are recalled.

This intervention will not work for all survivors of all offenses. However, individual steps may apply to specific survivors, even if the entire intervention is not relevant. In addition, survivors of an offense may not move through the various steps in succession. They may need to revisit steps, and certain steps may take longer than others. Working through these steps requires the time and the patience of the survivor and the helper. Reminding the survivor that forgiveness is

difficult and takes time may help to alleviate frustration and the pressure to forgive quickly.

This description of the REACH intervention is brief. Helpers interested in using this intervention are encouraged to read more extensive descriptions of REACH in the volume edited by Worthington.

FORGIVENESS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT GOD'S GRACE

The fourth way we can help survivors resolve the conflict between their religious beliefs and negative emotions is to remind them that the burden of forgiveness does not rest solely on their shoulders. In fact, genuine forgiveness is impossible without the grace of God. Smedes writes, "Forgiving anything at all is a minor miracle; forgiving *carte blanche* is silly. Nobody can do it. Except God. And the first rule for mere human beings in the forgiving game is to remember that we are not God." As humans, we are limited in our resources and capacity to forgive. Psychologists F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, in *The Faces of Forgiveness*, make this point clearly: "trying to work up the energy to forgive another exhausts human resources." Attempts to forgive without the grace of God will fail because human resources for forgiveness

are limited. Therefore, we must let God help us forgive.

*Corrie Ten Boom was liberated from a Nazi concentration camp shortly after the Allies conquered Germany. She spent years working through her pain and anger until she was able to forgive the Nazis who had tortured and dehumanized her. Her journey to forgiveness convinced her that forgiveness would help heal Europe so she preached about the possibilities of forgiveness across Europe, even in Germany. After a service in Munich during which she delivered her message, a man approached Corrie and held out his hand to her saying, "Ja Fraulein Ten Boom, I am so glad that Jesus forgives us all of our sin, just as you say." Corrie recognized the man as a former Nazi soldier who had worked in her concentration camp. She remembered being forced to take showers with other women prisoners while this man leered and mocked her. As the man put his hand closer to Corrie, her hand remained frozen at her side. She was unable to forgive and was terrified by her weakness. She prayed, "Jesus, I can't forgive this man. Forgive me." At that moment, she felt forgiven for her inability to forgive and, in the power of this feeling, took the hand of her enemy, releasing them both from terrible pasts. (Adapted from Lewis B. Smedes' *Forgive and Forget*).*

Corrie was unable to forgive on her own. However, with the grace of God, she was able to forgive a man who had done unforgivable things to her. As helpers we must remember and remind those we are helping to forgive that we do not and cannot forgive on our own. In fact, we are not expected to forgive on our own. Instead, we can rely on the grace of God to make even impossible forgiveness possible.

Forgiving someone who has hurt us is extremely difficult. Yet, as Christians, we are called to forgive "seventy-seven times," even if our transgressor does not apologize. Survivors of transgressions may feel caught between their pain and resentment and their religious beliefs. They may experience guilt and fear as a result of their inability to follow Jesus' command to forgive. As helpers, we know that forgiveness benefits survivors of offenses emotionally and spiritually.

However, the pain caused by offenses may seem too difficult to overcome. Fortunately, we can help survivors move toward forgiveness by allowing them to choose to forgive and understanding that forgiveness takes time. In addition, we can use formal forgiveness interventions to help survivors work through the forgiveness process. However, we must always remember that genuine forgiveness is achieved through the grace of God. As humans, we are limited in our capacity to forgive and help others forgive. By relying on the grace of God, we can achieve forgiveness that would be impossible to reach on our own.

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A Psychological and Personal Perspective on the Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation

Louis A. Gamino, Ph.D.

As a practicing clinical psychologist and lifelong Catholic, I have been fascinated by definite parallelisms between psychotherapy processes involving forgiveness and the Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation. Forgiveness in psychotherapy involves some of the same nontheological elements that the sacrament does. Conversely, the Sacrament of Reconciliation follows certain psychological principles in what it requires of the penitent.

In this essay intended for church ministers and interested laity, I explore these parallel processes with the hope that a thoughtful reflection of what psychotherapy and the Sacrament of Reconciliation have in common may enlighten both practitioners and ministers in their respective endeavors. My comments are based on my clinical experience and a variety of scholarly sources, as well as on my personal experiences with the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFINITIONS OF FORGIVENESS

Long considered the domain of theology and religion, the concept of forgiveness received relatively little attention from psychology until the last two decades. Efforts to distill a psychological definition of forgiveness have yielded some noteworthy proposals. For example, psychologists Robert D. Enright, Suzanne Freedman and Julio Rique, in *Exploring Forgiveness* (University of Wisconsin Press,

Practitioners who work with adult patients may find that an important focus of treatment is a problematic relationship from the person's past that is still a source of distress and that has never been resolved emotionally.

Madison, 1998) have defined forgiveness as "a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her." Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament & Carl E. Thoresen (in *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Guilford, New York, 2000) offered a similar definition of forgiveness as "intraindividual, prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is situated within a specific interpersonal context." Both definitions of forgiveness embody the concept of an interior change of heart by the forgiver as evidenced by (1) voluntary surrender of righteous anger or negativity, and (2) adoption of a more favorable, compassionate, positive stance toward the offender.

What is missing from these two definitions of forgiveness is consideration of the role of reconciliation between forgiver and offender. Forgiveness is generally construed as a unilateral response by the forgiver, occurring without solicitation from or participation by the offender. When the process becomes bilateral and involves restoration or healing of a broken relationship, reconciliation results. This aspect is particularly important in marital and family therapy, as will be described in the next section.

FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

In my experience, there are three major areas in which the issue of forgiveness frequently arises in psychotherapy: forgiveness of transgressors from the past, forgiveness of

self and forgiveness in marital and family therapy.

Transgressors from the past. Many psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety and some personality disorders, have their genesis in developmental experiences gone awry, including abuse, neglect and trauma. Practitioners who work with adult patients may find that an important focus of treatment is a problematic relationship from the person's past that is still a source of distress and that has never been resolved emotionally. When dealing with transgressors from the past, anger is a dominant emotion. Examples are legion: parents who are alcoholic, abusive, neglectful or impaired; siblings or family members who mistreat or disappoint; teachers or coaches who demean or discount; friends or lovers who betray or abandon; employers or supervisors who harass or terminate; children who are wayward or estranged; strangers who perpetrate criminal acts. In some instances, the transgressors are deceased or the relationships have ended so that there is no current contact possible (or desired).

So what is the potential role of forgiveness with transgressors from the past and how is it accomplished? In these situations, one of the overriding psychological considerations is to relegate such transgressions to the past so they no longer have the power to generate emotional distress in the present. To accomplish that, the patient is encouraged to "let go" of negative feelings, hatred and resentment in order to gain release from emotional bondage to the person or the event. Common psychotherapy maneuvers designed to promote such "letting go" include talking it out, reframing the event, developing perspective, journaling, "writing a letter" to the offender (which may be read in session and may or may not be mailed), confronting the offender (sometimes symbolically, such as through the Gestalt "empty chair" technique); visiting an emotionally significant location (e.g., childhood home, school, gravesite) or engaging in a specific ritual of release. An example of the last would be a decision by the forgiver to dispose of a physical object that symbolized or reminded him/her of the transgressor. All of these methods aim toward the first aspect of forgiveness as defined above — an interior change of heart evidenced by voluntary surrender of righteous anger or negative attributions and feelings.

Sometimes when a particular event, such as betrayal, or one dimension of a relationship (abuse) is released in this way, the possibility opens for rekindling of positive pathways and connections between the forgiver

and the offender. Or, sometimes, once the transgression is “understood” in a personally significant context (e.g., when hardships imposed by a dictatorial employer lead to the forgiver discovering latent strengths within self), the offender is then seen in less hostile and more magnanimous ways. In these instances, the second aspect of forgiveness — adoption of a more favorable, compassionate, positive stance toward the offender — may occur as well.

Forgiveness of self. Trying to forgive oneself is a problem commonly encountered by psychotherapists who are helping individuals reconcile their own faults and failings. Often the person has internal conflicts between competing emotions or conflicts between feelings and behavior. When attempting to forgive oneself for shortcomings of commission or omission, guilt is a dominant emotion.

Because the forgiver and the transgressor are one and the same person, a new dimension is introduced into self-forgiveness — repentance by the transgressing part of self. Forgiveness is no longer just a unilateral response on the part of the forgiver. In addition, forgiveness requires an apologetic and conciliatory attitude from the transgressing agent who, in this instance, is self. Harmony is restored through a delicate psychic interplay when the transgressing part of self seeks forgiveness and the forgiving part of self grants forgiveness. Thus, forgiveness of self involves three dimensions, including (1) letting go of anger and recrimination toward self, together with (2) adoption of a more beneficent, compassionate stance toward self occurring in the context of (3) a repentant and a conciliatory attitude by the transgressing part of self.

Forgiveness in marital and family therapy. Forgiveness in marital and family therapy places the process squarely in an interpersonal context, making it different from the largely intrapersonal context of forgiving transgressors from the past and forgiving of self. The dynamic between the forgiver and the offender determines whether reconciliation of the relationship can occur beyond unilateral forgiveness extended by the injured party.

A common marital problem in which forgiveness plays a role is infidelity. Kristina Coop Gordon, Donald H. Baucom and Douglas K. Snyder, in “The use of forgiveness in marital therapy,” conceptualized infidelity as an interpersonal trauma and described a three-stage model of forgiveness. Forgiveness is viewed as a process with roles played both by the injured partner

Forgiveness is no longer just a unilateral response on the part of the forgiver.

and the participating (in the affair) partner. Gordon *et al.* argue that forgiveness by the injured partner does not require reconciliation or that all the anger has to disappear. Instead, the injured partner needs to develop a realistic and balanced view of the relationship, experience a release from being controlled by negative affect toward the offending partner and relinquish voluntarily the right to punish the participating partner. Their model corresponds generally to the first two aspects of the psychological definition of forgiveness cited earlier in this article.

APOLOGY, ENDEAVORING, RESTITUTION

In my own work with couples recovering from an affair, I have conceptualized the process of forgiveness in three steps: apology, endeavoring and restitution. While the transgressing member is expected to take responsibility and initiative in seeking forgiveness, corresponding responses are required from the injured member who is extending forgiveness. The injured member forgives by letting go of angry, negative feelings and adopting a more generous, loving attitude toward the betrayer in the context of the transgressing member’s apology, endeavoring, and restitution. Reconciliation in the form of a restored or healed relationship is the clinical goal.

Apology involves the unfaithful spouse genuinely expressing contrition for the offense, showing sensitivity to the hurt inflicted on the spouse by the betrayal, and terminating the injurious behavior by ending the affair. Once assured that the affair is in the past, the injured member needs to be prepared to accept the apology in the spirit of forgiveness and be open to restoration of the relationship rather than maintaining

When parents apologize for wrongs done to their child in the past, reconciliation becomes possible, and relationship transformations may occur.

a mode of reprisal or a stance of mistrust.

Endeavoring involves development of mutual understanding of the factors that led to the affair, especially so that the transgressing member can work toward prevention of any future occurrences. The injured member needs to acknowledge any contributions on his or her part to the disaffection that preceded the affair and work on rectifying those as well. Both members are charged with maintaining vigilance toward any problematic conditions that led to the affair and communicating openly about the health of their relationship.

Restitution involves active steps taken by the transgressing party to “repair” the damage to the relationship caused by his or her waywardness. Often this means devoting extra time and energy to nurturing the spouse and cultivating closeness. The injured party needs to be receptive to such actions rather than rebuffing or “freezing out” the efforts by the offending partner. Appropriate restitution can aid reconciliation by counteracting deleterious emotional effects of the affair (e.g., deceit, betrayal, rejection) on the injured party.

There are other examples of the use of forgiveness in family therapy. James Framo, author of *Family Process*, pioneered the practice of conducting family-of-origin meetings as part of ongoing psychotherapy. Parents and siblings of the individual in treatment are invited to one or two sessions with the goal of helping the adult child get past his or her anger toward the parents and move toward a more compassionate understanding of them. The adult child is encouraged to see his or her parents as people, as fallible human beings with shortcomings which may have been the result of difficulties in their own lives that the child may know nothing

about. Forgiveness of parents (and sometimes siblings) is a central feature of these family-of-origin sessions. When parents apologize for wrongs done to their child in the past, reconciliation becomes possible, and relationship transformations may occur.

Similarly, Frederick A. DiBlasio and Judith Harris Proctor, writing in *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, proposed use of a “family forgiveness session” in resolving past offenses. The session is elective and is based on family members focusing on their *own* offenses, for which they wish to seek forgiveness, and their plan to stop the hurtful behaviors (rather than concentrating on offenses committed against them). Seeking forgiveness involves taking responsibility for one’s wrongful actions, demonstrating repentance by turning away from the problematic behavior and offering atonement as an outward sign of change. Forgiveness is granted if the offended party is willing to let go of negative feelings toward the offender on the issue in question; plans for improvement may be explored and negotiated.

In human psychology, there are not always clear distinctions between forgiveness of past transgressors or even forgiveness of self and forgiveness in marital and family therapy. For example, when efforts to forgive transgressors from the past lead to addressing directly a family member who has offended, principles identified in this latter section come into play. Or, forgiveness of self may be required (i.e., acknowledging one’s own shortcomings that contributed to mutually hurtful behavior in a relationship) in order to extend full forgiveness to another or to receive forgiveness from another.

FORGIVENESS IN THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is about conversion of the heart, an interior conversion (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

“Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time, it entails the desire and resolution to change one’s life, with hope in God’s mercy and trust in the help of his grace.”

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the penitent seeks forgiveness for offenses that disrupt his/her rela-

tionship with God. Also, the penitent seeks reconciliation with the church as a body of members who are damaged as well by the penitent's faults. God, in his mercy, forgives the penitent through the intervention of the church, specifically, the bishops and the priests who have been given the authority to forgive sins in God's name. Additionally, the priest represents the corporate church with whom the penitent is being reconciled.

The penitent has three acts to perform in the Sacrament of Reconciliation: contrition, confession and satisfaction. Contrition refers to a sense of sorrow and remorse over wrongdoings committed together with a resolution not to repeat these same offenses. Confession is the voluntary disclosure of sins to a priest. Confession is considered an essential element of the sacrament because in the process of recounting wrongs, the penitent takes full responsibility for his/her misdeeds and lays them at the feet of the Almighty. Satisfaction refers to what the penitent must do to repair the harm caused by his/her waywardness. While sacramental absolution takes away the penitent's sin, it does not remedy all the damage sin has caused. "Doing penance" is intended to render satisfaction for wrongdoings, both to God and to any person(s) harmed by the penitent's transgressions.

The end result of the sacramental process is reconciliation, a restoration of the violated relationship between the penitent and God and between the penitent and the broader Christian community. Theologically, sins are remitted and punishment averted. Temporal benefits also accrue, including peace of mind and heart, serenity of conscience and spiritual consolation.

FIVE PARALLELS

1. Reciprocity between extending and seeking forgiveness. At first glance, it may appear that forgiveness in psychotherapy is mainly about *extending* forgiveness to others while the Sacrament of Reconciliation is mainly about the penitent *seeking* forgiveness. However, extending forgiveness and seeking forgiveness are really two sides of the same coin. This can be seen in psychotherapy as well as in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Frequently, the psychotherapy patient is the primary actor initiating efforts to forgive past transgressors or present adversaries. Yet, as noted earlier, forgiveness in psychotherapy has many dimensions. Forgiveness of self involves both seeking and extending forgiveness — the transgressor and the forgiver are the same person.

Seeking forgiveness from self requires an attitude of humility and regret about one's shortcomings; extending forgiveness to self requires compassion and acceptance from the moderating parts of self.

In marital and family therapy, forgiveness quickly can become a two-way street. When extending forgiveness to a loved one, the loved one may, in turn, respond by apologizing and seeking reconciliation. Or, in the interaction, reciprocal shortcomings and failures of the forgiver may be exposed, resulting in a turnaround wherein the original forgiver becomes the one seeking forgiveness for his/her contribution to the relationship problems.

A similar reversal of "positions" may occur in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. What begins with the penitent seeking forgiveness of sins from God and the corporate church may become a situation wherein the penitent must extend forgiveness to another before his/her own contrition is genuine and unmarred. Such is the spirit of Matthew 5:24, "...go first and be reconciled with your brother..." before seeking God's forgiveness. This directive is designed to eliminate duplicitous situations, such as a penitent seeking God's forgiveness for mistreating a loved one while still internally harboring anger or resentment toward that person. In seeking forgiveness from God, one must extend forgiveness to others in order to receive forgiveness for oneself. This is precisely the lesson of the parable in Matthew 18 about the unrelenting servant who begged successfully for his master's forgiveness of a large debt but would not extend similar consideration to another indebted to him for a much smaller amount.

Likewise, a penitent may seek God's forgiveness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation without being completely willing to forgive self. In such instances, the individual's persistent self-condemnation constitutes an impediment to realizing the full benefit of the sacrament. Again, receiving forgiveness from God for one's shortcomings requires magnanimity toward self on the part of the person seeking divine forgiveness.

The integration of psychological theories with theological traditions regarding forgiveness is the subject of a thoughtful essay by Jared P. Pingleton in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*. The reciprocal relationship between extending and seeking forgiveness is encapsulated in three maxims: "(a) forgiveness can only be received from God if given to others, (b) forgiveness can only be given to others if received from self, (c) forgiveness can only be given to self if received from God." Forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation typically

Through self-disclosure in psychotherapy, an individual takes ownership of and begins to assume responsibility for his/her truest reactions, no matter how embarrassing, self-serving, shameful or reprehensible.

begins with (a) and often progresses to include (b) and (c). Forgiveness in psychotherapy most frequently begins with (b) and then, for persons of faith, graduates to (c) and (a). While the beginning positions may be different, the circularity is inescapable.

2. *Interiority*. It is clear that forgiveness in psychotherapy and the Sacrament of Reconciliation both rely on an individual's *interior change of heart*. Whether defined in psychological terms (e.g., "intraindividual prosocial change") or theological ones (e.g., repentance and conversion), change of heart entails a distinct shift in the individual's inner emotional landscape. Change of heart is an "inside out" transformation in how the person construes self, others and the larger world.

Genuine change of heart is an integrated response requiring new patterns of thought, a different spectrum of emotions and a willing determination to revise a previously held stance. In psychotherapy, instead of resentment, bitterness and anger toward someone who has offended him/her, the individual willingly adopts a position of compassion, conciliation and goodwill. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, instead of continuing in a pattern of waywardness that distances oneself from God, one decides to turn away from the injurious behavior in order to reform and return to communion with God. The "inside out" character of an interior change of heart is well summarized by Jesus' admonition to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:26, "...cleanse first the inside of the cup so that the outside may also be clean."

3. *Disclosure*. Empathic listening has been described as one of the cornerstones of psychotherapy. The psychotherapist, by virtue of listening, provides a neutral forum in which an individual can report his/her most intimate thoughts, feelings, impulses and behaviors.

Admitting such privately held material, sometimes referred to as "speaking the unspeakable," to a non-judgmental, objective listener can bring enormous relief. Accordingly, Freud originally described psychoanalysis as "the talking cure."

Through self-disclosure in psychotherapy, an individual takes ownership of and begins to assume responsibility for his/her truest reactions, no matter how embarrassing, self-serving, shameful or reprehensible. In the case of forgiving others, these unseemly reactions may include anger, vindictiveness, retribution or even homicidal urges. The psychotherapeutic encounter presents not only an avenue for unburdening deeper aspects of the inner self but also an opportunity for the individual to explore the meanings and the implications of these personal disclosures. With such exploration comes the opportunity to consciously choose one's ultimate response, such as choosing to forgive. "Confession can be good for the psyche as well as for the soul."

Confession, of course, is a large part of what the Sacrament of Reconciliation is about for the penitent. Confessing one's sins to a bishop or a priest is considered an essential element of the sacrament and is a feature unique to Catholicism. In the early days of the Catholic Church, some of the impetus was rooted in the belief that confessing was a way to rid oneself of sin, that the evil inherent in one's misdeeds was ejected in the process of telling them out loud. The penitent is required to confess grave sins to a priest because sins are not just an affront to God, they also damage society and the church. Confessing to a priest forces an acknowledgement of wrongdoing to a representative of those injured by the misdeed(s).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* supports the idea that there is human as well as spiritual benefit in confession: "Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible." Disclosure to one's confessor can authenticate the process of accounting for one's sins before God. The interpersonal nature of the penitent-priest encounter in the Sacrament of Reconciliation intensifies the task of confessing as the scrutiny of the priest forces a more searching inventory of self. For those who come to the sacrament prepared to express repentance with appropriate humility and with a sincere resolution not to repeat their offenses, the partic-

ipation of the priest can heighten the relief experienced by unburdening. In other words, “Confession is good for the soul.”

4. Restitution. Just as the Sacrament of Reconciliation is still called “Confession” by some, the sacrament is also referred to as “Penance.” This name refers to the third essential element required of the penitent, that of making satisfaction for wrongdoings. Because one’s communion with God is damaged by sin, traditional penances involve prayer, fasting and almsgiving. However, the physical or the human toll resulting from the penitent’s misdeeds often requires making satisfaction in temporal ways. Such restitution restores the harm caused by sin or “rights the wrong” done to victims hurt by the penitent’s misbehavior.

Seeking forgiveness in psychotherapy involves more than just verbal apologies from the transgressor to the victim(s). The words need to be supported by concrete actions. Restitution is often required. Returning to the example of marital therapy following an affair, I sometimes hear from the partner who was involved in the affair, “Can’t we just put this in the past and go on?” Usually this partner wants a short cut or a quick fix to the trust problems created by the affair. He/she wants to skip over restitution. Yet, there is real work to be done in cultivating trust, regaining credibility, tending the emotional wounds wrought by the affair and healing the love relationship. Stephen R. Covey, in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, writes eloquently about the many ways to rebuild trust in a relationship if it has been lost. Such is the nature of restitution, the “penance” of the offender, whether in the Sacrament of Reconciliation or in psychotherapy when seeking forgiveness.

5. Reconciling. A final parallel between forgiveness in psychotherapy and the Sacrament of Reconciliation concerns the act of reconciling or healing a broken relationship. Reconciling goes far beyond performing restitution to compensate justly for harm done to a victim. Reconciling is the highest order outcome that can result from the forgiveness process, whether in the Sacrament of Reconciliation or in psychotherapy.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God welcomes the conversion, the interior change of heart, of the penitent. God’s generous forgiveness of sins opens the door to full communion with God, reconciling the penitent to God in an intimate, loving, grace-filled relationship. The beneficence of God’s forgiveness and the open-armed invitation to reconcile is portrayed

poignantly in Luke’s Gospel story of the forgiving father and his prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).

The sacrament also reconciles the penitent with the whole church and reestablishes fraternal or “ecclesial” communion. Once again, the penitent is rejoined in relationship to his/her sisters and brothers in Christ who, like God, have been offended or hurt by the penitent’s misdeeds. Reconciling makes the Christian family whole again.

Likewise, in psychotherapy, when a transgressor seeking forgiveness is rejoined in relationship with the victim extending forgiveness, true reconciling has occurred. When I have been party to such outcomes in a psychotherapy setting, it has been psychologically healing for the participants and professionally gratifying for me. However, as is clear from the various examples of the forgiveness process in psychotherapy cited earlier, sometimes forgiveness is sought but not granted, and sometimes forgiveness is extended but reconciliation is not desired. Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, in *The Gift of Peace*, wrote a courageous account of forgiving and reconciliation with the man who had made false accusations of sexual misconduct against the cardinal. Bernardin’s example challenges readers and is a reminder that, in human affairs as in divine ones, reconciliation remains the highest possible expression of forgiveness.

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

I grew up in a traditional Catholic family in which priests were revered and often befriended. Priests have rejoiced with me, personally and sacramentally, at some of the greatest moments of my life: graduations, my marriage, the Baptisms of my children and my parents’ fiftieth wedding anniversary. Priests have also comforted me, personally and sacramentally, during tragic times in my life: funerals of close relatives, a painful divorce and the death of a newborn child. Most of these events occurred in the context of the Eucharist. They would not have had the same meaning without the sacramental involvement of the priest in making Christ truly present in the sacrifice of the Mass.

Yet, when I consider my spiritual life, I have no doubt that some of the most important, life-changing moments I have experienced with priests came not during the life events I just mentioned, but during the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

For example, I remember when the priest told me it

I remember when the priest told me that instead of hating my enemy, I needed to pray for my enemy in order to effect a real change of heart.

was not enough merely to “confess” my sin and declare that I was sorry; no, I had to go out and undertake restitution in the real world with the party I had wronged. I remember when the priest told me that instead of hating my enemy, I needed to pray for my enemy in order to effect a real change of heart. I remember when a priest was insightful enough to have my wife and me come to reconciliation together, to address each other and forgive each other. I remember when the priest helped me see that I was angry with God, and that I had to give up that anger before asking for God’s forgiveness of me.

The old maxim goes, “To err is human, to forgive is divine.” I really believe that because it has been in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that I have most genuinely experienced priests acting *in persona Christi*. Some of these moments have been so profound as to change the course of my life and shape me into the Catholic Christian I am today. When the priest has listened with acceptance, treated me with compassion, provided suggestions for correcting my faults, guided me toward a change of heart and forgiven me, all the while letting me know that I was still loved as a child of God, then I really did encounter Christ — the loving, compassionate, forgiving Christ we read about in the Gospels.

In my personal experience, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is about healing and restoring relationships: the relationship between the penitent and God; the penitent’s relationship with self; and relationships between the penitent and those he/she has hurt or those who have hurt him/her. When priests exercise their faculty to forgive in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, they do much to change the world for the better, one penitent at a time.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have described five major parallels between forgiveness processes in psychotherapy and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These include reciprocity

between extending and seeking forgiveness, interiority, disclosure, restitution and reconciling. It is my belief that psychotherapists who incorporate forgiveness processes in their work will benefit from a fuller understanding of the theology of forgiveness on which the Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation is based. I believe also that priests and ministers will be more effective in their application of the sacramental aspects of forgiveness when cognizant of psychological theories pertaining to forgiveness and reconciliation. Finally, my personal experience has shown me the enormous power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and its value for both psychological and spiritual growth.

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The Intimate Life

James Torrens, S.J.

The Ones We Miss

Do you miss so and so
with whom you lived so long?
Well, I have to admit, no,
our house having held a throng.

It's not like Bibi and Marge
on the phone any time of day,
laughing about inanities,
crestfallen if one's away,

or like Giulio and Matty,
wordless but thick as thieves
with their pipes on the back porch.
One goes to God, one grieves.

What I relish is catch-up talk
with my intimates here and there,
if they're back from a long hiatus
or only in reach of prayer.

Acertain drama keeps repeating itself. Some companion of ours, much admired, leaves a religious life or the priesthood after years of service because, as the message of farewell says, of a strong attraction to intimacy. There is always a residue of sadness to this departure, perhaps some anger, too (little acknowledged), but no one disputes the attraction. And the incident sets the rest of us to wondering whether the vowed and celibate life does indeed mean no intimacy, period.

“Intimacy” gets bandied about in different senses. Perhaps it is more accurate to say it has gradations. The provincial of my Jesuit province recent-

ly asked, in a letter to the province: “How do we make the sharing of our lives, especially in areas of intimacy, faith-sharing and mutuality, more possible?” The concern, he explains, is raised by the young men among us who love their ministries but often find the communities lonely. In his letter he focuses on being able to converse openly about sensitive and controversial topics, and gives as examples the war in Iraq, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, sexuality and sexual orientation. (Plenty of other burning issues spring to mind.) Without this degree of intimacy, he implies, we are at least partially mysteries to one another, uneasy housemates, members in good standing left on our own.

Henri Nouwen wrote about intimacy in terms redolent of those Dutch interiors that we see in paintings by Vermeer, sheltering places that allow familiarity and silence. To me, at least, this helps explain Nouwen’s attraction to L’Arche, imbued as it is with the spirit of Jean Vanier. He found in L’Arche an intimate place that he could truly call home. Leona English wrote about Nouwen that for him “the development of significant friendships is crucial. Each person needs a home — a place where they can be with friends. These friends become extensions of ourselves only if we allow them to be — that is, only if we let them become intimate with us” (“A Close Look at Intimacy,” *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Summer 1999).

Nouwen’s writing, and indeed his life, broaches the topic of those we call our intimates. An intimate is a dear friend with whom you share a rainbow of things — satisfactions, dilemmas, deep misgivings, stinging hurts. With such a person you can chatter or be calmly silent, in a pattern that gradually establishes itself. When I was growing up, we got to know our Mom’s childhood friends, pals, whom, much to our amusement, she called “the girls.” A local pastor also figured among her inti-

mates. *Un buon pastore* she found him, which helps me realize the privileged access that ministry can give.

There is a pathology, or distortion, of intimacy, too. On bus trips or in other public places we encounter the people who reveal themselves impulsively to perfect strangers. Alcohol is sometimes the cause, but more often a deficient ego or sense of self. In the group psychology of the terrible seventies, things were forced out of people in truly shameful and embarrassing ways. The result was to make many swear to themselves, "Never again." Instant intimates or instant intimacy are contradictions in terms.

So what about "intimacies?" They take place among lovers, of course. Sex is generally their language, a bodily way for love to express itself, with many overtones of appreciation, trust, gratitude. A one-night stand does not really include intimacies understood in this way. A passionate affair may not do so either. Intimacies, by definition, do not respect boundaries, so they are not appropriate to the celibate life. The attempt at them, when indulged despite the promise not to do so, can present a classic case of the double life. Refraining from such intimacies demands self-discipline and a set of personal rules. The promise of celibacy, the vow of chastity, involve sacrifice, as does any dedicated single life. But "sacrifice," after all, means not "destruction" or "wastage" but holy offering.

It is intimacy at the sexual and emotional level — the yearning for it, the attraction to it, perhaps already the engagement in it — that has drawn off a fair number from religious life and the priesthood in the last half century. Loneliness, that terrible ache that can afflict one anywhere, but above all in solitary postings, uncongenial rectories or schools, or tense communities, can intensify the attraction. Any young adult contem-

plating diocesan priesthood or religious community these days may well ask himself or herself, "How can I not yearn for such intimacy?"

Henri Cole, a contemporary poet, recently said to an interviewer: "Human beings need love, which is the highest function of our species. It is in this connection that we either fail or succeed; it is our vocation on earth" (*American Poetry Review*, May/June 2004). It seems pretty clear that some measure of intimacy, meaning the closeness of love, is appropriate to each of us. And it should go without saying that a religious or priestly vocation needs to be fueled by the highest form of intimacy, the love of God. It makes no sense without it.

We are here in the realm of faith and prayer. The first epistle of Peter delivers a tremendous encomium to the early Christian converts: "Without having seen him you love him" (I Peter 1:8). To love a Someone who is vast, intangible, and to do this through the many dry seasons that can affect the spiritual life — what an extraordinary challenge! Yet this may be our vocation, our real calling, our gift. I used the term "gift of celibacy" recently in a retreat to priests and got this response from a peppery monsignor: "I always looked on celibacy as a requirement, not as a gift. This is a new twist." But he welcomed the twist. How long it can take us to get the essential!

Archbishop Joseph Pittau, celebrating the anniversary of a seminary in Saskatoon, Canada, had this to say: "The only real motivation for celibacy is being faithful to the call to total imitation of Christ. Celibacy is a problem of love, and love cannot be easily explained or reasoned. Love is simply love" (*Origins*, October 24, 2002). For him an indicator for whether someone is living celibacy healthily is the presence of joy. But joy cannot be faked; in lonely or frustrating times it can be difficult to come by. So at times just

hanging on can be admirable, a real experience and testimonial of grace.

We are unaware often of the need that others have of our intimacy with God. Bishop Timothy Dolan recalls what a Jewish psychiatrist remarked to him as a young priest: "Keep telling your people that God loves them. Most of the problems I deal with come from people who believe no one loves them, that they are unlovable, so they don't even love and respect themselves" (*Priests for the Third Millennium*).

We ourselves have to start with the sense of being loved. Julian of Norwich had that contemplative grace: "I understood that everything has its being owing to God's care and love." Saint Paul, who was such a vibrant personality and warm friend to many of his converts, who had a heart large enough for all the churches, started with this very personal realization: "He loved me and delivered himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). The love of God was Paul's environment. Familiarity with God was the focus, too, of Saint Ignatius Loyola, especially in that capstone prayer of his *Spiritual Exercises*, the great "Contemplation for Attaining Love."

"Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds

than by words," Ignatius remarks. The commandment of mutual love is the continual message of Jesus at the Last Supper, according to Saint John, and in his farewell discourse. And it looms large in the First Epistle of John. The Gospel of John presents the beloved disciple as the person closest to the heart of Jesus and the one who instinctively recognized him. New Testament scholars have debated who exactly this Beloved Disciple was. The effect of their surprising uncertainty is to make us realize the inclusiveness of this mysterious phrase. The Beloved Disciple, the intimate of Jesus, can be not only John the apostle, or Mary of Bethany, or Mary Magdalene, but any of us. Beloved disciple is the identity we all have to foster, be we in orders, be we in vows, or be we without either. It is identity enough to engage and fuel a lifetime.



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WHY DO WOMEN CHOOSE CAREERS LIKE MEDICINE OVER THOSE LIKE ENGINEERING?

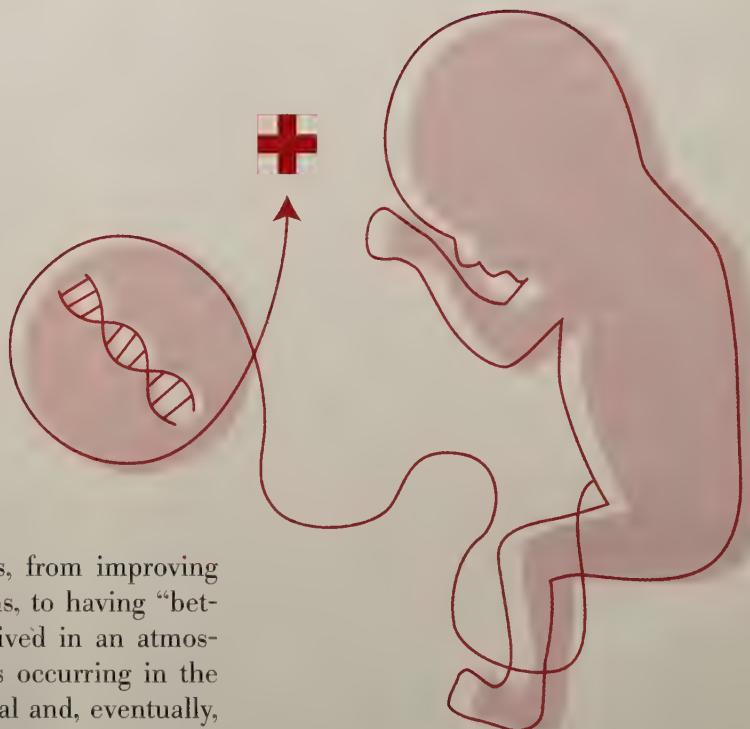
Conventional wisdom would say that the answer to this question is easy: Women have less aptitude for mathematics than men and do not tend to choose careers that require large doses of math and physical sciences.

Not so, say Jacquelynne Eccles, Ph.D., of the University of Michigan, and her research associate, Mina Vida. They found that women tended to choose occupations that were more people-oriented even when they had strong aptitude for and interest in mathematics.

Their motivation seems to be the desire to be of help to others, and they perceive that careers in physics and the hard sciences will not allow this motivation much play. In fact, both girls and boys who were more people-oriented, they found, tended to go into the biological and social sciences rather than into the physical sciences. The results of their studies are reported in *Monitor on Psychology* (September, 2003, p. 13).

Enhancement: **How Far Should We Go?**

Thomas A. Shannon, Ph.D.



Enhancement of life can take many forms, from improving one's immigrant life, to self-help programs, to having "better" material possessions. Our lives are lived in an atmosphere of enhancement. Now, however, a shift is occurring in the means of enhancement, one that involves medical and, eventually, genetic enhancement. These new enhancements present special dangers for our culture and raise serious ethical questions that will be considered in this article.

Meanwhile, if there is any common denominator to parenthood it is surely the desire to pass on a better life to one's children. Whatever the situation of the parents, one of their fondest hopes seems to be a better legacy for their offspring — and perhaps even for their grandchildren.

Part of this desire in America for an enhanced life is, I believe, related to the dream of our immigrant ancestors who came here for a better life. These immigrants arrived with little, worked diligently, sacrificed, saved and eventually made a better life for their children. They assimilated them into the American culture, put them in private elementary and secondary schools and then enabled them to attend college. The American dream was — and continues to be — realized in the enhanced lives of many immigrants.

Part of this desire is also a function of the competitive spirit that lies deep within our culture. American culture encourages winning

and doing what is necessary to win, whether this be the proper networking, the right college, the right social circle, the right clothes or the right donations to worthy causes. All of these efforts are social enhancements calculated to gain the competitive edge.

Another element of enhancement in our culture is all the self-help movements, the twelve-step programs, all manner of therapeutic practices and all the spa treatments. These focus on discovering and releasing the powers within oneself so that one can live life more fully and in a better manner.

The cosmetics industry — whether pharmaceutical or surgical — is devoted to enhancement. This point is too obvious to comment on further.

There is also a religious dimension to enhancement in that we are continually exhorted to be better, to be transformed and to seek perfection. In some ways we can think of penitential practices and seasons, such as Lent, as enhancement practices in that they are to help us transform ourselves into better practitioners of our religion and better persons. Religious living is a journey of ever-increasing perfection.

Enhancement is part and parcel of our daily lives even though we may not have thought of it in that way. Each time we use the word "better" we are speaking enhancement language whether it refers to a car, a house, a dishwasher, clothing or our life partner or a child. Job reviews are standard mechanisms of enhancement in that we are to specify new goals that will better our performance. Grading of students by faculty is to enhance performance on the next assignment. In short, our lives are lived in an atmosphere of enhancement.

WHAT'S NEW?

So, what is new in the enhancement discussion? The answer: What is new and substantively different is a shift in means of enhancement.

All of the means of enhancement discussed above are social and cultural. That is, these means of enhancement use a variety of mechanisms that are customarily present in the culture. Also, they are typically external to the individual and are not physically invasive, though they may require much physical activity, as in piano lessons or soccer practice. These means of enhancement are social in that they operate through a variety of institutions within society. The family is the first social enhancer. Here the child learns values and ways of acting, but more importantly is given aspira-

Each time we use the word "better" we are speaking enhancement language whether it refers to a car, a house, a dishwasher, clothing or our life partner or a child.

tions, goals to achieve and status to secure. The message here is that the status quo is to be transcended. There is an old joke that captures this element in a telling way: What is the difference between the International Women's Garment Workers Union and the American Psychiatric Association? The answer: one generation. This testifies to both the power of aspirations and a willingness to work to achieve one's aspirations. Socialization is a major mechanism of enhancement.

Schools are major social enhancers. This is why there is so much debate over the quality of schools and anguish over where to send one's child. It is also the reason tuition for kindergarten at some private schools in New York is more than the annual tuition for many colleges. The issue is not only what you will learn at this school and how this will prepare you for your next step. Almost equally important is whom you will meet at this school; for if you meet the right people, one can secure a better social situation and the right contacts for better employment.

Children are also encouraged or made to participate in a variety of extracurricular programs, from music to sports to volunteer work, all of which are desired to enhance the skills they may already have and to enhance one's college application. All manner of camps and schools are set up to help the enhancement process — even from a tender age.

These means and others like them that continue all through our lives are social, external and, to some extent, fallible. That is, a parent or school or coach or employer can push and push and push and can employ any number of mechanisms to encourage enhancement, and the results can be less than enhancing. A child who is clumsy may never develop into a dancer — even though they may learn how not to destroy their partner's shoes. A child with little physical grace may never be a ranked gymnast. A child with small hands

However, what is already occurring — and somewhat independently of the human genome project — is a kind of reverse enhancement: the rejection of a particular genotype (all or part of the genetic constitution of an individual or group).

may never be a skilled pianist regardless of the quality of the lessons and the teacher. A child may go to the best schools and meet all the right people, but still prefer to work in a job that brings them happiness rather than enhanced social and economic status.

REJECTION OF ENHANCEMENTS

These social forms of enhancement, even though powerful, motivating and often guilt-producing, can, in fact, be rejected by the one subject to them. Though the socialization mechanisms are powerful and even deeply internalized into our psyches, we, in fact, can reject them. We can choose other paths; we can identify our own goals, and we can even hope for “a good life” rather than “a better life.” Socialization has a limit, and that limit is the individual.

What is new is that the methods of enhancement now being considered are medical and, specifically, genetic. The new methods of enhancement are internal rather than external, can alter our physiology as well as our psychology, and the effects may be irreversible. The new methods also represent a shift in medical interventions from primarily therapeutic to primarily enhancement.

We are in a process of transition from relying primarily on social means of enhancement to using genetic means. Currently, the primary mechanism of this transitional phase is pharmacological. Many of the drugs used in this transitional period began as important therapeutic interventions but have been expanded to enhancements. Probably the clearest example of this is the expanding use of drugs for erectile dysfunction. The early advertisements for Viagra featured Bob Dole who promoted it for use after prostate surgery. There was a linking of illness and a physiological side effect from the therapy, as well as a recognition of the side effects of aging. Then came Levitra with the image of a somewhat middle-aged man throwing a football

through a tire and then being greeted by a younger-looking attractive partner. Now we have Cialis, which got the nickname the “weekender” from its thirty-six-hour effectiveness, and which is being marketed for “when the time is right.” What began as a clearly therapeutic intervention is now being expanded for recreational enhancement.

A step beyond the pharmaceutical is the genetic. Much attention has been paid to genetics over the past years because of the completion of the Human Genome Project. This multiyear and multibillion dollar project produced the map of the human genome. This map is aiding researchers in tracking and identifying a variety of genes that have a direct causal effect on diseases or that are associated with a variety of other conditions that contribute to diseases. This is an extremely important development because if a gene is the cause of a disease, genetic intervention could be a way to correct the copy of the gene and prevent the disease from occurring in the first place. Perhaps the passing down of deleterious genes from one generation to another could also be avoided. This research is in the initial phases, and much work is yet to be done.

REVERSE ENHANCEMENT

However, what is already occurring — and somewhat independently of the human genome project — is a kind of reverse enhancement: the rejection of a particular genotype (all or part of the genetic constitution of an individual or group). This is done in conjunction with amniocentesis or other prenatal diagnostic technologies. Here if a problematic genetic profile is discovered, the fetus can be rejected through abortion. But there is also another movement occurring, mainly in conjunction with assisted reproductive technologies. This is the selecting of particular eggs or sperm based on both a physical and psychological profile of the vendors of the eggs or sperm — and frequently profiles of their parents and grandparents. The simplest example of this attempt at the genetic enhancement of one’s child is found by looking at ads for egg and sperm vendors in college newspapers. These ads typically specify a particular ethnic background, a particular I.Q. or S.A.T. level, a specific height, a particular ability such as musical or athletic, and sometimes eye and hair color. While part of this is surely an attempt to match the vendors to the social parents, there is also the

direct suggestion that certain traits are being selected, and the assumption is that these are somehow genetically linked. One can also go online and obtain profiles of vendors so that one can select the correct traits for one's offspring. Childbearing is, for some at least, no longer a matter of a desire, some candlelight and some mystery. One can clearly attempt to custom design one's child with built-in enhancements for a particular career or lifestyle.

As we continue to delve deeper into the mysteries of genetics, and as more and more associations of genes and behavior are made, it is highly probable that the same pattern will occur. First, a variety of therapies will be developed. Then the techniques used to develop these therapies, as well as all of the means to deliver the genes to the correct site in the body, will gradually be extended to other issues. The move from therapy to genetic enhancement will certainly occur here as it has in almost every other area of medicine.

SOME ETHICAL REFLECTIONS

But genetic enhancement, for the most part, is a way off yet. We have an opportunity to think about this application before we get too far down the path. Unfortunately, we are quite a way down the enhancement path already, though not genetically. Steroids are obviously accepted by many athletes to enhance their performance. We use cosmetic surgery to enhance our bodies. Human growth hormone is used to enhance the height of children — typically, but not always, male — of average or even slightly taller height. A variety of mood-enhancing drugs are used to help us feel better even though we are not clinically depressed. Thus the first issue in considering enhancement is that it is already relatively well accepted.

But a second issue that we must keep in mind is that enhancement is not totally evil. As I noted earlier, the Christian tradition certainly encourages our continual spiritual development. Recall the oft-repeated line from the Christian scriptures: "You are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." And, culturally and socially we want ourselves and our children to develop, to improve and to enhance their lives. This is an important part of human development.

PROBLEMS WITH ENHANCEMENT

But there are problems with enhancement. The first

One can clearly attempt to custom design one's child with built-in enhancements for a particular career or lifestyle.

comes with making it an end in itself. In this way the particular trait we are trying to enhance becomes isolated from the rest of our lives and becomes the sole standard against which we measure our dignity and our human worth. Once we focus exclusively on enhancing our intelligence, for example, our relationships may turn into ones of competition and dominance, rather than relationships that nourish and refresh us. Any good that becomes isolated and highlighted through enhancement can end up being problematic for our overall development.

Genetic determinism. Second, there is a particular danger in the use of genetic means for enhancement. This is the traditional problem of genetic determinism. This problem has surfaced with fantasies about cloning copies of superior athletes, musicians, models or soldiers. And it is being practiced in assisted reproductive clinics in which eggs and sperms are chosen because of traits manifested by the vendors of such gametes, or cells. In these cases, the assumption is that if one has selected a child with a particular set of genes, then that child will act as the one from whom the genes came. The genes will determine the behavior. Thus, if a child is generated from egg and sperm vendors with S.A.T. scores in the 1,500-1,600 range, then, of course, the child will be bright and clearly get into the best college and then turn out to be a brilliant scientist, or lawyer, etc. I call this the fallacy of genetic profiling. In less nuanced terms, this means that even though your child may have a superior set of genes, he or she may yet turn out to be a jerk. Or become ill, or be an underachiever, or want to do volunteer work in the inner city, or be an actor, or do something other than what the parents and the genetic profile have stipulated. The problem is that try as we might socially and genetically, our children emerge with minds and wills of their own, and efforts to enhance them in a particular direction will turn out badly, as experience and history teach us.

Five sins. Third, the bioethicist Glenn McGee, in his book *The Perfect Baby* identified what he calls five sins

Genetic interventions for both therapy and enhancement are as yet not validated, and much more research must occur before such interventions should even be available.

of genetic enhancement, particularly in relation to parenthood, but sins that can affect us all. These are:

1. Calculativeness
2. Overbearingness
3. Shortsightedness
4. Hasty judgment
5. Pessimism.

Important to note about this list is that these sins are not new. They are, however, given a new seriousness with the advent of genetic attempts to achieve certain enhancements. I want to reflect upon these sins because I think they present specific dangers, particularly for our culture.

Genetic interventions will give new abilities, for example, to *calculate* particular genetic profiles and how they might impact development. The danger here is the traditional one of knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing. If a set of parents has heavily invested in purchasing the best genetic material available for their child, one should not be surprised if they become a tad *overbearing* when the priceless possession deviates from the parental and genetic plan. *Shortsightedness* is a particular curse of our culture. We prepare for the immediate opportunity; we plan for the bottom line of this financial quarter; we study for this test; we dress for this season. And when everything changes, we are either left holding the bag or have few other resources to deal with the new situation. Genetics can only intensify this already problematic situation. For our genetic interventions will be to resolve this problem, this situation and this set of particular circumstances and will not be orientated to future contingencies. I frequently argue to my students that evolution does not always progress by the survival of the fittest, but rather, occasionally, by survival of the unfit because the unfit are not specialized for a particular

environmental niche. The unfit are not so genetically fine-tuned that they can survive in one environment only. They have a wildness that allows them latitude for survival in a variety of contexts.

Our cultural tendency to shortsightedness is, of course, related to our other cultural problem of *hasty judgment*. All problems must be solved and solved immediately. And so we reach for the first available solution. Planning for the long term is almost un-American. Hasty judgment also closes off the future because it will not consider various options or contingencies. Finally, *pessimism* leads us to a deep distrust of the present situation. Surely the way things are cannot be correct. Clearly we must improve the situation. Only our enhancements can bring about the future that is obviously intended. And this sort of pessimism or distrust of the present and an open future reinforces the other sins in this list and has the possibility of engendering an even deeper despair when we realize that neither our calculations nor our genes will give us a secure future.

Safety. A final traditional issue with enhancement technologies is their safety, both short and long term. We know that some enhancement technologies, such as steroids, have serious health side effects over both the short term and the long term. We can project that other enhancement technologies, such as efforts to extend the human life, will have substantive effects on social policies, for example, retirement policies relating to health insurance, pension security and assisted-living facilities. The practice of enhancing parental desires with respect to controlling the sex of their children is already producing significant disparities in the ratio of males and females in various countries and is having deleterious effects on marriage and the birth rate. Genetic interventions for both therapy and enhancement are as yet not validated, and much more research must occur before such interventions should even be available.

SOME RELIGIOUS ISSUES

To this point the focus has been on traditional ethical issues. I will turn now to some religious perspectives, particularly from the Catholic Christian tradition.

I want to begin with an insight into morality from the framework of the medieval Franciscan philosopher John Duns Scotus. Following Anselm, the theologian and philosopher, Scotus distinguishes two movements

in the will as the *affectio commodi* — the inclination to seek what is advantageous or good for oneself — and the *affectio justitiae* — the inclination to seek the good in itself.

The *affectio commodi* is self-centered and directed to seeking its own welfare or good and drives us to seek our advantage in what we do. It is important to remember that in the Scotistic framework, this drive to self-perfection is given by God and is a basic good. From this perspective we can argue that enhancement is a good.

But the *affectio justitiae* leads us to see the value of another reality, a good distinct from ourselves and independent of our interests. The conclusion is that one can distinguish at least a good and a better in human life. What is good in human life is a life that perfects us, that brings our being to a greater actualization. This is the realization of the *affectio commodi*, but it is a realization of the good for oneself. John Boler, in “Transcending the Natural: Duns Scotus on the Two Affections of the Will” (*American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, LXVII, 1993) states this bluntly: “morality cannot be an extension or refinement of a project of self-realization and/or eudaimonism (as that Aristotelian theme had been developed in the Middle Ages) but requires precisely going beyond it.” What is better is the transcendence of self, either to appreciate goods independent of us or even to curb our legitimate interest in self-perfection to seek the good of others for their own sakes. This is the realization of the *affectio justitiae*. This affection for justice can moderate the *affectio commodi*, can transcend the happiness presented to it by its nature and its natural inclinations, and can, in fact, act beyond its nature. This perspective critiques enhancement precisely because enhancement seeks a good that is simply self-fulfilling rather than self-transcending. While the capacity that one seeks to enhance is undoubtedly a good, the enhancement limits that good to oneself and limits its value to the self alone.

Another dimension of the enhancement debate from a religious perspective is the term “playing God.” We often use the term “playing God” as a way of arguing that humans have overstepped their boundaries. This term suggests that a clear demarcation exists between the roles of God and humans and that there are areas of life in which God rules, where God is in charge, and where humans should not enter. The term evokes an omnipotent God who is the Creator of all and who

The conclusion is that one can distinguish at least a good and a better in human life. What is good in human life is a life that perfects us, that brings our being to a greater actualization.

commands all. The term also evokes the image of God as “God of the Gaps,” that is, the God who is invoked when all else fails, or when we have exceeded our limits, our knowledge is at an end and our powers frustrated. Thus, it is most clearly in the gaps that God rules, and it is in the gaps that God’s power is most clearly evoked. Here, God reigns supreme and, here, we cannot play God.

Of course, as knowledge increases, the gaps grow increasingly smaller, and as a result, God’s reign shrinks; God’s power becomes lessened, and God becomes less necessary. Then humans step into the recently vacated gaps and play God by exercising the powers in the gaps previously thought only God’s. Cloning surely symbolizes such a disappearance of a gap and an exercise of new powers.

Such a vision of human intervention into nature is hardly Christian. It is certainly much more Greek, much more resonant with the myth of Prometheus, who in stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humans became more like the gods and thus played God. However, he suffered the fate of one who usurped the power of the gods. (For his deed, Prometheus was chained by Zeus to Mount Caucasus. Each day an eagle came and tore at his liver, and each night the liver regenerated. This lasted for many thousands of years until he was released from this torment by Hercules.)

Were the God who is suggested by this version of playing God actually this fearful of sharing creation, presumably, God would never have created in the first place. Why spoil the way things are?

Perhaps a better rendering of playing God is to learn

The implications for enhancement are precisely to put back into our lives the sense of play and the creativity that genuine playfulness generates.

as much about God as one can and then to play God by acting as God acts. Minimally this might mean that we are to be creative as well as generous in our creativity and to keep covenant with our God and our creations. To affirm this is to surrender full control because we are not God. But it is also to assert a profound relation between ourselves and the rest of created reality. We play God by imitating God — no small task.

Acting as God acts. Two immediate consequences follow from this. First, this image of playing God does not set up a kind of competition between God and humans. The theme is stripped of its traditional mythological overtones and given a chance to return to a version much more faithful to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Second, in principle, such an understanding of playing God does not prohibit interventions in created reality. The moral element here would focus on what kind of intervention. A more helpful hermeneutic, or interpretation, for understanding the term “playing God” might, in fact, be genuine play — and the nuance here is that play cannot be purely instrumental, for then it is no longer play, but work. And although the book of Genesis describes creation as a labor from which God rested (Genesis 1:2-3), and the book of Job presents creation as a kind of civil engineering project (Job 38:1-38), the book of Wisdom describes creation as a form of play (Proverbs 8:30-31).

The implications for enhancement are precisely to put back into our lives the sense of play and the creativity that genuine playfulness generates. It is precisely to reject the sins of calculativeness and shortsightedness referred to above. For if one genuinely plays, one is open to new dimensions of reality and is renewed by contact with them. Enhancement on the other hand narrows our sense of reality and seeks to create a future only of our design. Play is not opposed to design but lets the design emerge from the freedom operative within play.

In the image of God. A second religious theme is that of the human created in the image of God. A traditional understanding of this theme is that humans are stewards who conserve and protect what God has created. Typically, one does this by respecting both the design of creation and the limits that God has placed on both the orders of biological nature and human society. Because this God designed the universe according to a plan and indeed embedded this plan into nature, the responsibility of a steward is to remain faithful to this plan and conserve it.

Such an interpretation of the image of God in human beings is a conservative one which, while not totally opposed to all interventions, is focused more on recognizing limits and maintaining boundaries. This is not done because of a lack of Promethean pride, but rather out of a sense of genuine humility, a recognition of one’s place before God and a sense of how one is to live out one’s vocation in the world.

But another understanding of the image of God in human beings is one suggested by Philip Hefner: the created co-creator. This phrase is important on two levels. First, it identifies humans as created. That is, because we are created we are dependent on God for our present and continued existence, and we are not God’s equals as creators. But, second, we are co-creators. We become participants with God in the continuous evolving of both nature and history. We have a responsibility both for the development of each and for our neighbors as we seek to further the divine work of creation. Such a view clearly allows a much expanded view of human intervention into the world. As evolving, the world is a work in progress, and its fulfillment is partially dependent on our interacting with it through the creative use of our freedom.

As the world evolves, we evolve with it. And the reality of evolution is openness to the future, a responsiveness to changing circumstances, a participation in a process that is open-ended. This is where enhancement raises significant problems. Because, if anything, enhancement seeks to highlight one feature and one feature only of a particular individual. It represents a significant closing off of the individual to the process of development that is evolution by selecting a characteristic that is of immediate use to the individual. Rather than engage in the task of being a creative co-creator, the one who seeks to enhance may actually freeze a trait by seeking to give it an exaggerated importance. Rather than being a creative part of the evolutionary

process, the enhancement takes a trait out of context and isolates it, thus diminishing its potential benefits.

CONCLUSION

Enhancement, whether social or genetic, is a part of our culture, and it is here to stay. And it is a mixed blessing. Enhancement is responsible for many positive developments on a personal and a social level. Yet it can be responsible for stifling creativity and for closing off the future. As humans we are called upon actively to develop and perfect ourselves, yet as we do this we can commit any or all of the five sins that McGee escribed. What we need to keep in mind as we continue our human journey is both parts of the created co-creator description of humans. Because we are created, we are finite, and our vision may be limited or distorted. From a Christian perspective, sin disrupts our relation with God and our community. Saint Bonaventure escribed the effect of original sin as curving us in upon ourselves. And this can be the best description of enhancement gone wrong. Yet we are to be co-creators, to be active participants in the ongoing adventure of an involving universe. Bonaventure describes this as a process of *deiformitas* — our gradual transformation to the image of God through our activities in the world. And this is the best description of enhancement going in the correct direction. And, of course, this is to restate the dilemma of enhancement — which is also to restate the dilemma of living the religious life and the continuing ethical dilemma surrounding enhancement.

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THE BENEFITS OF BEING CONSCIENTIOUS

In the 1970s, psychologists Paul Costa, Ph.D., and Robert McCrae, Ph.D., of the National Institutes of Health, and Warren Norman, Ph.D., of the University of Michigan and Lewis Goldbert, Ph.D., of the University of Oregon defined five positive personality traits: extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, openness and conscientiousness.

The latter concept is defined by a leaning toward impulse control, responsibility, orderliness, achievement and conventionality, according to Brent Roberts, Ph.D., of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, who spoke at a recent conference on Positive Psychology.

Roberts presented research indicating that high levels of conscientiousness correlate with more activity, better diet, less alcohol and drug use, less risky driving behavior, less risk of suicide and fewer instances of violence, all behaviors associated with longevity. Conscientiousness seems to increase over the lifetimes of those who have the trait, as do the healthy behaviors. Roberts believes that its positive social benefits should lead us to try to figure out how to instill the trait in people, especially adolescents. (Reported in *Monitor on Psychology* December, 2003, 26-27.)

Throwaway Kids

Peg Cessna, H.M.



They were my boys. All twenty-two of them. I'm not certain why we clicked, but it may have been because I did not think of them or treat them like crops that needed to be rotated. That's what their science teacher told them when he changed his seating plan. Classes were grouped according to ability. They were on the bottom of the bottom. And they knew it.

I found out that for most of them it was not a matter of ability but rather a lack of motivation. They could focus when they wanted. They could remember when they were interested.

They were tough street kids, and almost all of them smoked. It was a while ago, and an unusual school rule allowed boys to smoke in the parking lot at lunchtime. Being a former smoker, I knew what that break meant to them. So I built on a carrot that I dangled in front of them every day. If they were appropriate in their behavior and at least feigned interests in the lesson, I would dismiss them two minutes before the bell. Lunch followed class, and this way they could be first in line in the cafeteria, gulp their lunch and make it to the parking lot in time for a few extra puffs. If they were inappropriate or uninterested, I held them two minutes after the end of class. They then had to choose between food and nicotine.

I held them late very few times. As they left early, part of the deal was that they had to escape undetected by anyone in the adjacent classrooms. It was a sight to see — these hulking almost-men tip-

being silently to the stairs and down. They knew that anyone found out about our pact they would be doomed. Along with me.

Magic happened in that room.

"Take a break, Sis," Tom would say. "I'll set up the projector and run the film for you." He became the proj-o man."

Frank whispered one day before class, "Ron's brother was in a car wreck last night so he might not be able to pay attention today. Go easy with him."

I don't think Dominic knew that I was a racing fan the day he asked at the beginning of class, "So, who do you like in the Derby?" I gave him an assignment, and the next day he put a chart on the side board listing the jockeys, entries, post positions and odds. He spent a few minutes explaining odds and told his students they had twenty-four hours to make their picks. Whoever had the winner would get a weekend without homework. "And by the way," he said, "read the paper before you pick your horse."

Dennis showed me an ad from an auto magazine. This is the car I'm going to buy as soon as I get a job." I suggested that would be a great reward to give himself when he finished college. But we both knew he would never cross the threshold of advanced education. My earnest hope was that he would cross the high school stage to pick up his diploma. The odds were not in his favor.

Jerry sat in the last seat of the row. His gym towel was on the floor under his desk. His buddy across the aisle grabbed the towel, flipped it against the floor and the contents rolled to the front of the room. I told Jerry, who was in obvious pain, not to worry. I had five brothers and had seen athletic supporters before.

These were throwaway kids. They were not scholars or athletes. Not debaters or thespians. No student council or class office positions for them. More often than not, they were in detention after school or the principal's office during the day. My sense was that

they had experienced a lot in their young lives. Except for kindness. They were not used to someone being kind to them. What I found out about them is that they all had hearts the size of Wyoming. Their response to my kindness was kindness. They went out of their way to help me. They relaxed in my presence as I did in theirs. We had a good time.

I was fair with them and offered to help them in any way that I could. They knew what I expected. They were hoping for D's. I was hoping for C's and B's because I knew that they could do it. They all passed. None with flying colors. But pass they did.

I do not pretend to think that eighteen weeks in my classroom was a transforming experience for them. It was, however, a transforming experience for me. They taught me as much as I taught them. I learned in a brand new way that kindness works. Fairness works. I learned that there is no such thing as a throwaway kid. That sometimes it takes as little as a bet on the Derby to break through tough exteriors. They allowed me a glance at hearts that hungered for something as simple as a little deal that worked in their favor. They were not used to that. They gobbled it up. Showed up for class. At least looked interested. Got their smokes. Engraved themselves indelibly on my memory.

They were my boys. And, honest to God, they made me love them.



Sister Peg Cessna, H.M., is a sister of the Humility of Mary; she was a high school teacher for twenty-five years, founder of Heartbeats, of which she served as its Executive Director.

Book Reviews

Reflection and Dialogue Series, 1999-2001; Theological Reflection for Transformation; prepared by Dianne Bergant, C.S.A., Faustino M. Cruz, S.M., Kathleen Dorsey-Bellow, Bernard Lee, S.M., Maureen O'Brien, 2004. Chicago: Center for the Study of Religious Life, 44 pages. \$7.00. Order by e-mail: NCCV400@aol.com.

Throughout the 1990s, the phenomenon called contemporary Catholic religious life attracted the attention of sociologists and psychologists as a potential subject of research. The published results of these studies, however, seemed to have received minimal attention, even by those for whom such studies might have been expected to have the greatest interest and impact — religious themselves.

In 1998, joined by their mutual commitment to ongoing renewal, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) and the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago (CTU) joined efforts in looking for a way to prevent the potential loss of the benefit of these various studies. One result of their collaboration was the setting up of the Center for the Study of Religious Life (CSRL). Located on CTU's campus, the Center's mission is to conduct interdisciplinary and intercultural reflection on the life of Catholic religious sisters, brothers and priests in the United States.

The Center's first project was a series of dialogues designed as invitational "learning conferences." These conferences gathered men and women religious from various cultural groups, generations, professions and traditions of religious life. Held in three different geographical areas of the United States, each dialogue included panelists — theologians and social scientists — who brought the perspective of their disciplines to the questions of religious life. The four booklets reviewed here resulted from these dialogues. Their deceptively small size — the longest is just ninety pages — belies how much useful material can be packed into such an unassuming format.

The three booklets in the *Reflection and Dialogue*

Series present the results of a series of dialogues held between 1999 and 2001. A single theme focused the content and process for each dialogue: "What mission confronts religious life in the U.S. today?" (1999), "Community in society, church, and religious life making the connections" (2000), and "Becoming a religious: a process of lifelong transformation" (2001). Each booklet differs in format from the others, but all contain the major elements in the dialogue: key points raised by the various panelists, a summary of the participants' responses and recommendations, a theological reflection on the topic and a bibliography.

Demonstrating the Center's commitment to engage religious at large in these questions, each booklet also outlines the steps for conducting an interdisciplinary dialogue and invites religious communities into this process.

Stirred by the experience of the dialogues described above, religious communities sought help for continuing theological reflection. In *Theological Reflection for Transformation*, CSRL offers religious communities a simple format for developing the "habit or virtue of theological reflection" among their own members. Given the heterogeneous nature of religious life in the United States, the Center made a wise choice in selecting as authors five practical theologians who represent cultural, generational and geographic diversity, and both lay and religious life. Remarkably compact, this booklet describes a three-step process for moving a group toward transformative action. To add to the usefulness of this resource, the authors have included examples of how one might do a theological reflection on two different themes: "Community Charism" and "Community As An Agent of Transformation." Appendix A describes three approaches to social analysis, and Appendix B provides a select annotated bibliography.

The path of transformation on which we religious set out forty years ago is longer than we may have imagined it would be. A striking characteristic of this long journey of renewal, however, is the collaboration and collegial spirit it has called forth from women and men religious in the United States and, indeed, in the world. This collaboration and collegiality produces a synergy that witnesses to the amazing power of the Holy Spirit.

the interdisciplinary and intercultural work of the Center for the Study of Religious Life is just one product of this synergy. Through its publications, the Center makes action research a real possibility for our congregations. The Center is an agent of common learning, providing a basis for thoughtful action. As our congregations use that learning, take action, reflect on and give feedback to the Center, we participate in and sustain the spiral process of learning. We discover that we indeed make the path of transformation by walking it.

— Gertrude Foley, S.C., D. Min.

acts of Faith, Acts of Love: Gay Catholic Autobiographies as Sacred Texts, by Dugan McGinley. New York: Continuum, 2004. \$26.95.

Those of us fortunate enough to have gay friends have learned from them about their identity: full of the same humor and tragedy, challenge and frustration, sadness and elation that make up most human lives. But gay Catholics can be conflicted because the simplistic teaching of a church, which many of them love, reduces their complex identity to sexual acts. Further, it unnaturally severs the *being* from the *doing* of sexuality.

Our newspapers and churches are filled with questions about gay rights, same-sex marriage and gay/lesbian adoption. What we may miss is the human face of the debate. In this regard, McGinley has done a great service, assembling and analyzing forty gay Catholic autobiographies. Some excerpts are funny, others heart-breaking; all attempt to save lives. They are acts of courage and sacred texts because they save not only the author, but also other gay Catholics for whom following church teaching "led not to virtue but to pathology."

Daniel Curzon erupts in frustration: "To the Church, questioning, living — *everything* — is a sin!" The official teaching posits one sexuality as the norm and all others as deviant, which does not reflect the full range of ethical possibilities theologians are exploring. Even as the church professes to welcome gay Catholics, it denies their humanity and forces them to choose between two core identities: as Catholic and as gay. This "dialectic of embrace and resistance" recurs throughout the texts. Rafael Campo writes, "I bitterly

embodied as deep a schism as any in the Catholic Church's long, divisive and blood-soaked history."

One spies the glimmer of the author's grin, responding to a "deafening silence" on the part of hierarchy that will not even consider fresh possibilities. "Fortunately, the discussion takes place in spite of them." Richard Rodriguez compares the human being to a violin; God makes the music. Just as God's love cannot be diminished by the instrument, so God's love flows through gay and straight person alike.

The reader closes this book with mixed emotions. One feels gratitude for the insights revealed by the collected autobiographies and the thematic analysis of them. Even those of us who thought we understood the gay dilemma will learn about it in greater depth.

One wants to send the book to those in leadership, pleading, "Can you not hear the poignancy of these stories? How can you condemn human beings God created? What puts you in any position to mete out judgment? And how soon will you invite discussion and reform church teaching?" The failure of the people of God has been to define gay people in terms of sexual acts, rather than focusing on their sacramental encounter with God's design in their lives. The loss of gay gifts to the community would be tragic, indeed, yet the current climate seems designed to drive them away.

Maybe the final emotion is hope. If this work stirs in other readers the type of empathy for our common humanity that it did in me, then change has already begun. Those who say they model the compassion of Jesus cannot condone such callous treatment of gay brothers and lesbian sisters. We must together listen, reconcile and reform.

— Kathy Coffey

Violence, Society, and the Church: A Cultural Approach, by Gerald A. Arbuckle, S.M. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004. 252 pages. \$52.95.

Since the scandal crisis over priestly pedophilia broke a couple of years ago, we have all been on the lookout for ways to cope with the distressing state of the Catholic Church. It has become evident that the sexual abuse angle of the crisis has its context in a

much wider pattern of secretiveness and non-accountability in church practice. Apart from some increased vigilance over priests and their altar boys, nothing has much altered in the level of trouble that faces the church, as the bishops have stonewalled on any further dimensions of the crisis. We have to expect that much more damage will follow should these broader issues not be addressed.

New Zealander Father Gerald Arbuckle takes a useful approach to this complex of problems, setting the Catholic Church's travails in their cultural context and recognizing how much violence takes place in the course of church members' resistance and subservience to cultural change. This is not one of the books — there are many — that sets out to flay the church in its time of trouble, but one that looks, with great love for the church, to understand the origin of its ills and search for healing.

To look at the church in the context of cultural developments in society is to deny some of the exceptionism that people traditionally attribute to the church, as if it were immune to the cultural shifts of the rest of society. We often hear the invocation that "the church is not a democracy," meaning that we should not expect that the church would be affected by the political/cultural trends of our time. But, in fact, the church has followed the secular drift of an older, imperial and authoritarian culture. Its resistance to change is as stuck in the quite secular patterns of culture as is any other part of our social and political scene. The church often resists change longer than other aspects of our society by asserting a claim of divine origin to cultural habits which, in fact, arose from the secular atmosphere of past cultures.

Father Arbuckle takes an interest in many of the subtler forms of violence that inform our cultures: not only wars and killings, but also the intimidation, coercion, backbiting and abuse of the weak or the marginal that shape the power structures and struggles of secular and religious systems alike. He classifies cultures as *pre-*

modern, modern and post-modern, with a fourth cultural form, an objective of reform, which he calls *para-modern*. Like other aspects of society, the church can vacillate among these, choosing blindly aspects of the pre- or post-modern as they suit other purposes. The extended kinship patterns of pre-modern societies, useful for enforcing centralized power relations, attract those who want to quell dissent to the status quo, using such tools as gossip, shame and humiliation. But equally, the impersonal bureaucracy, individualistic careerism, Social Darwinism and enforced order of modern culture patterns can be adopted uncritically in the church without adverting to the ways they deform the Christian witness through such negative elements of the secular culture as envy, jealousy and scapegoating.

Father Arbuckle consistently places church practice in the context of such features of the culture at large, showing how easily we draw on those aspects of the violent cultures around us even as we criticize them rather than seek the counter-cultural Gospel values that would actually transform them. The newer, post-modern revolutionary fervor, rooted in the cultural turmoil of the 1960s, has found its place in the turbulence and mutual intolerance of the contemporary church. Differences are approached with forms of violence, most often psychological, from either side: repression and rebellion, efforts to discredit and de-legitimize the other, all far removed from the faith values we profess as a church, but drawn unthinkingly from the demons of the time.

Here is the value of Father Arbuckle's observations. He sees how far our church practice lives and has long lived on elements, deeply imbued with many forms of violence, not only foreign to its deeper tradition but counter to it. The para-modern culture he hopes to see develop in the church would draw critically on the best elements of the various cultures, from which our life can never be isolated, and inform them with the critical commitments of our faith.

— Raymond G. Helmick, S.